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DANTE IN AMERICA.

INTRODUCTION.

THE interest in modern languages and literature which is so widespread in America to-day is of comparatively recent origin. What little there was at the end of the last century and in the beginning of this is to be traced to commercial needs or to social ambitions. Moreover, those who sought instruction were often compelled to study under incompetent and even self-taught men who had little notion of the literature, and sometimes no idea of the proper pronunciation of the languages they professed to teach. In the colleges it was not much better ; at Harvard, says Lowell, "a stray Frenchman was caught now and then and kept as long as he could endure the baiting of his pupils. After failing as a teacher of his mother-tongue, he commonly turned dancing-master, a calling which public opinion seems to have put on the same intellectual level with the other."¹ Da Ponte tells us that on the occasion of his first visit to New York, in 1805, it took him but a few days to discover that there was as little known in that city of the language and literature of his native country as of the language and literature of Turkey or China. In Boston, in 1815, George Ticknor found it not only difficult to get a copy of Dante, but altogether impossible to get help in reading it. Now all this is changed ; the study of the modern languages has been placed on an equal footing with classical studies, and the growth of interest in our special author is indicative of the extent of the change. At present, ten of our leading colleges are offering special courses in the study of the *Divina Commedia* ; Harvard and Cornell have most excellent Dante collections, and Dantesque litera-

¹ Address before the Modern Language Association, Cambridge, Mass., December, 1889.

ture is well represented in many public and private libraries. In our larger cities lectures are frequently given on the poet and his works, while among the new books and in the literary journals the name of Dante is constantly recurring.

This contrast between the present interest in Dante and the small following which he had in America in the early part of the century indicates an advance in culture and sound literary judgment. The statement that the love of Italian poetry has risen and fallen in England with the rise and decay of true poetic feeling and workmanship, is also, in a much more restricted measure, of course, true of American letters.

Dante and his master-work have entered into the literary heritage of our day, — not only of continental Europe, but also of the English-speaking people at home and abroad. To trace his varied fortunes before attaining to the universally acknowledged position of a world-poet, is one of the most captivating and instructive pieces of research-work in the history of literature. He was praised and worshipped by one generation, to be neglected or altogether misunderstood — a worse fate — by the next. To many people of different times Dante has been but a name ; often the well-known name of a man about whom a few facts, gained at second-hand, have sufficed to sate curiosity. Among English men of letters we find him admired and imitated by Chaucer, read by Spenser, possibly known to Sackville, and curiously estimated by that saucy poet of Elizabeth's day, Sir John Harington, while by Francis Meres he was compared to Matthew Roydon ! Then came Milton, by whom (to his glory be it said) tribute was paid to him both in prose and verse. After this, there follows a period in which there is no token of Dante being esteemed worthy the attention of English men of culture. Thus, in 1749, Lord Chesterfield writes to his son, urging him to the study of the Italian language, and asserts that the only two Italian poets who merit his attention are Ariosto and Tasso. Voltaire gave voice to the opinion of the reading world of his day when he said of Dante : " Il y a de lui une vingtaine de traits qu'on sait par cœur : cela suffit pour s'épargner la peine d'examiner le reste." But with the weakening of the autocratic sway of eighteenth-century classicism and the assertion of sounder principles of literary criticism, Dante's star rose slowly and

steadily in the horizon of English letters. Gray translated a canto from the *Divina Commedia*; Coleridge lectured on Dante; Byron wrote his "Prophecy of Dante," and Leigh Hunt built up his "Story of Rimini" on Dante's famous episode, of which he wrote in his preface that it was "indeed the most cordial and refreshing one in the whole of that singular poem, the *Inferno* . . . which, I confess, has always appeared to me a kind of sublime nightmare." Hunt had not outgrown his cramped and unsympathetic appreciation of Dante thirty years later, when he wrote his "Stories from the Italian Poets." Such utterances as we find there and in contemporary criticism show us that this art had not yet been firmly reëstablished on a scientific basis.

However, the greatest factor in the fortune of Dante in England, and secondarily in America, was the number of translations of his work which had already begun to appear. It was one of the hopeful signs of returning liberty and consequent right growth of appreciation. He was Englished in turn by Rogers, Boyd, Cary, Dayman, Wright, Cayley, and an increasing host of others, until to-day the appearance of a new translation, in whole or part, has become quite an ordinary literary event. Though their merits differ widely, each translation has had at least its own circle of readers, and so has helped to draw attention to this master-work, and to lead many to the study of the original.

But while of late years Dante has had so large a following in England, he has been no less warmly received in America. It is but natural that it should be so. From England we inherited many of our traditions and tastes; when Dante came to be widely read in England we welcomed him here, read him, and began to study him for ourselves. The first Dante printed in America was Cary's translation, Philadelphia, 1822, — six years later than Hoole's Ariosto,¹ and twelve years later than the same writer's Tasso.² The selected sonnets and odes translated from Petrarch by George Frederick Nott,³ were

¹ Philadelphia, Henry Hudson, 1816. 6 vols. 24°.

² First American from the eighth London edition. Newburyport, E. Little & Co., etc., 1810. 2 vols. 8°.

³ Boston, J. Belcher, 1809. 12°. *Same*. New York, Inskeep & Bradford, etc. 1809.

reprinted in this country as early as 1809, which is also the date of the American issue of Mrs. Dobson's translation of De Sade's *Life of Petrarch*.¹ This antedating of Dante in America by the other three of the *quattro poeti italiani* is but another indication of the source of our first introduction to Italian literature. Both in England and America Dante came last, but seems destined to stay longest.

LORENZO DA PONTE.

The man to whom credit is due for being the first in America to direct attention to the beauties of Italian literature, and expound Dante to an American audience, is Lorenzo Da Ponte. This man of unique character and most varied fortune is by no means so well known as his personality and life would warrant. Born of Hebrew parents in 1749, in Ceneda, a small city in the province of Venetia, he was denied, owing to the popular prejudice against Jews, the privilege of attendance at the common schools.² At the age of fourteen, feeling the need of greater educational advantages, he became a convert to Christianity and entered the seminary of his native town, where he found a protector in the Bishop Lorenzo Da Ponte, whose name he thenceforth assumed. Six years later, on the death of his patron, he left Ceneda and went to the seminary at Porto Gruaro, where a little later he held for two years a professorship of rhetoric. His subsequent novel experiences at Venice, his banishment thence and his journeying to Dresden and afterwards to Vienna in search of a position as court-poet, which he secured at the latter place and held for twelve years under Joseph II, his dismissal by Joseph's

¹ Philadelphia, A. Finley & W. H. Hopkins, 1809. 2 vols. 16°. *Same*. Boston, Farrand, Mallory & Co.

² We do not know Da Ponte's real name; he tells us very little about his own family. His Hebrew origin has been questioned, and the matter has been discussed *pro* and *con*. There is one little argument for it which I have never seen brought forward. In his discourse "Sull' Italia," of 1821, he quotes Exodus in the original Hebrew. If not brought up in the rabbinical lore, when and where did he learn the language of the Pentateuch?

successor and his departure for London, where he met with varied success until compelled by the failure of the Italian theatre there to seek anew his fortune in America at the age of sixty,—all this is delightfully told in his “Memorie.” These were printed in Italian, New York, 1823, and in a revised and enlarged edition in 1829–30. The book is now exceedingly scarce and is mostly treasured by those who care to know more of the librettist of Mozart’s “Don Giovanni” and “Il Nozze di Figaro.”¹ Despite faults common to the autobiographic writing of the time, Da Ponte’s memoirs form very pleasant reading, and it is to be regretted that they are not to be had complete in any but the poorly printed volumes of the author’s lifetime. The book has received more attention abroad than here, and has been translated into both French and German.²

¹ Da Ponte tells us that on the night in which he began “Don Giovanni” he started by reading a few lines from Dante’s *Inferno*, in order, as he says, to put himself into good tune !

² In a copy of the French translation by M. C. D. de la Chavanne (Paris, 1860), belonging to the Library Company of Philadelphia, I find the following MS. note : “This translation was unfortunately made from the first edition. In 1829 Da Ponte published in Italian a second edition for his pupils, much fuller of entertaining facts and thoughts. I knew him intimately during four of his years in Sunbury. A perfectly honest man, a delightful companion, unsuspecting and often led into trouble by rogues. He was tall, well-built, very beautiful, and of highly polished manners. He was very temperate and regular in all his ways. He was thoroughly versed in Latin, which he quoted and spoke with fluency. He died in New York in 1838, aged 89; hence the translator has erred in making him say, p. 355, that he was then, at the publication of his first edition, in his ninety-seventh year. I was his family physician four years,—et nunc ‘fungor inani munere.’”

S[AMUEL] J[ACKSON], 1237 Spruce St. [Phila.].

Mr. H. E. Krehbiel, apropos of a performance of “Don Giovanni,” in his “Review of the New York Musical Season, 1889–90,” has written the best account of Da Ponte in America; he clears up many hitherto uncertain points. For other sketches, see Dr. John W. Francis’ “Old New York,” 1866, pp. 254, 260–269; Samuel Ward, Jr., in the *New York Mirror*, August, 1838 (afterwards reprinted for private circulation); H. T. Tuckerman in *Putnam’s Magazine*, November, 1868, vol. xii, pp. 527–536, reprinted in the *Dublin University Magazine*, August, 1872, vol. lxxx, pp. 215–224; Mrs. Janet Ross in *Macmillan’s Magazine*, November, 1891, vol. lxxv, pp. 53–56; Prof. G. R. Carpenter in the *Columbia [College] Literary Monthly*, April, 1895, vol. iii, pp. 289–292.

It is not within our province to discuss the different aspects of Da Ponte's character. He himself confesses to a "debolezza," to which he attributes his many failures. He had no aptitude for business, and was constantly bringing his industrious wife to grief; yet he was always sure to be struck with fitting remorse for his faults, and was not sparing in self-reproach. During the first years of his residence in America, his ill-starred fate seems to have followed him; after spending a few years in New York, he embarked in various business ventures in one place and another, and soon fell an easy prey to unprincipled schemers. But on the 14th of August, 1818,— "benedetto sia il giorno," says he,— he bade good-bye to his country store at Sunbury, in Pennsylvania, and before long returned to New York. Here a more congenial life opened to him. He installed himself as bookseller and importer of Italian books and wares, and eked out his income by teaching the Italian language to a rapidly widening circle of cultured young men and women. He soon became a favorite tutor in the best families of the city. With young ladies he was particularly successful; he has printed, without correction, a number of Italian letters which he received from them, and it must be said that they are of a quality to do credit to both the aptness of the pupils and the efficiency of the teacher. They are of value to us in furnishing ample evidence of the enthusiasm for Italian literature inspired by the teaching of Da Ponte, and proving how popular an author Dante was among the pupils. Some of them send prose translations of passages from the *Divina Commedia*, and all evince for the poem a fondness born of the skill and care of their instructor. It is to these fair pupils that he makes this appeal in his "Orazione" of 1828: "Voi, voi mie carissime allieve, che di sangue più vivido, di fibre più sensibili, e di spiriti forse più delicati, io vidi tanto sovente

Arder, gelar, languir, fremer, gioire,

alla lettura de' nostri autori, voi facilmente potete intendere e dire, quanto agevole mi sarebbe abbagliare, innamorare, stordire, offrendo de' saggi d' incomparabile grandezza, sublimità, originalità nel poema di Dante." There is no doubt but that with Da Ponte teaching was a labor of love, and that he was truly fond of his young pupils and had their affection in return. He very prettily dedicates an edition

of three of his librettos to "tre leggiadrissimi fiori del suo toscano giardino."

Da Ponte is often brief on matters which to us seem of far greater importance than the entanglements and annoyances to which he was constantly subjected. We would gladly exchange some of his disquisitions upon the worthlessness of seeming friends and the repeated narration of business difficulties for a fuller account of his career as librettist before coming to America, or of his pedagogical experience after finally settling in our metropolis. His, however, is not the only autobiography with which this fault of lack of perspective is to be found. We must be thankful that he has given us an outline of his method of introducing pupils to Italian literature. He tells us that after he had drilled them in the rudiments of the language and had read with them the best writers of Tuscan prose suited to their respective attainments, he gave them the poets, beginning with Metastasio and Alfieri, and leading up to Tasso, Petrarch, and Dante. I translate from the second edition of his memoirs :

Although all these authors were generally loved, yet who was admired and studied the most? It was the Ghibelline. This most just admiration accorded to the father and chief of our literature impelled me to study with the greatest fervor that divine poem, so that I might throw light on its obscurities and explain its difficult passages. I had already studied and pondered the most celebrated commentators ; nevertheless, it appearing to me that a place still remained for illustrations, I myself dared to make some for various cantos, which one of my most cultured pupils published in a journal which he was editing. Although my observations gave general pleasure, yet in order to assure myself of their value I decided to send a copy of them to Biagioli, truly a commentator of much merit, of whose annotations I circulated more than ten copies in America. In the preface appended to his first edition¹ he invites scholars of *il bel paese* to make known to him where he may have erred through ignorance or through too great ardor, and promises to receive *con seno aperto* their comments and corrections, and report them with the names of their authors in a new edition, if such were ever issued. Since, however, Signor Biagioli has neither received me *con seno aperto*, nor considered me worthy of a reply, I knew to my shame that he neither placed me among the scholars of Italy (and in this point I acknowledge him to be right), nor did he believe my

¹ Paris, 1818-19. Vol. i, p. xliv.

observations worthy of being reported by him. . . . Perhaps he thought it strange that an insignificant language-master, who has now been living for more than fifteen years in America, dares to hold opinions different from his own on the interpretation of Dante. But you know well, dear Signor Biagioli, that the good Homer sometimes nods, and that a man without eyes found a horse-shoe which others had not found with their eyes.

Da Ponte goes on to say that the tacit judgment of so erudite a philologist as Biagioli so discouraged him that he did not dare to continue the work of annotation which he had begun; nevertheless, he preferred to appeal to the scholars of Italy for a decision as to the merit of his ideas, and to this end he purposed appending to the third volume of his memoirs a note giving the main differences between his interpretations and those of Biagioli, but, I regret to say, the volume comes to an end without any such note appearing.

These references to his differings with Biagioli have long been known to Dantists interested in Da Ponte, but no one could tell what they were or where they had been published. It was only after a long search that I found them in a magazine edited by his son-in-law, Professor Henry J. Anderson (the favorite pupil to whom he so frequently refers), in conjunction with William Cullen Bryant and Robert C. Sands. The journal came into existence in May, 1825, was known as the *New York Review and Athenæum Magazine*, and died on entering upon its second year. As copies of it are to be found in but few of our libraries, I have thought it desirable to reprint in an appendix this earliest contribution from America to the textual criticism of the *Divina Commedia*.

In the *Rivista Contemporanea* for May, 1861, Jacopo Bernardi wrote on "La *Divina Commedia* interpretata per la prima volta da Lorenzo Da Ponte agli Americani." He speaks of Da Ponte as an "infaticabile promulgatore delle glorie dantesche," and prints "alcune eloquenti pagine che intorno all' Alighieri scriveva Lorenzo Da Ponte, quando recava, insieme all' insegnamento della lingua italiana, il conoscimento e l'affetto del massimo nostro scrittore in America." He gives the following from Da Ponte's "Storia incredibile ma vera" of 1833:¹

¹ Nuova Jorca, Joseph Desnoues, 1833. 16°. pp. 35. This constitutes the second part of his "Storia della compagnia dell' opera italiana condotta da Giacomo Montresor in America in agosto dell' anno 1832." [New York, 1833.]

Son passati omai venti otto anni da che vivo in America. Conobbi all' arrivo mio che niente vi si sapea della lingua e letteratura italiana, e animato da patrio zelo e dall' amore del bene, credei che fosse cosa da me l' introdurle. Se quegli, dicev' io, che porta un' erba salutare, un fiore leggiadro, una pianta di frutto raro in un paese straniero, è dalla gente lodato, di quanta maggior lode non dee reputarsi degno colui che per la prima volta vi porta la più dolce di tutte le moderne favelle e la più vasta e ammirabile letteratura? Io toccava l' anno cinquantesimo sesto quando giunsi in America, e all' anno cinquantesimo nono mi posi al nobile cimento. Sono ora vicino all' ottantesimo quinto, e in questo spazio di tempo, io solo, io non favorito dalla fortuna, anzi da continue disavventure e peripezie travagliato e sbattuto, ebbi il costante coraggio d' introdurre e questa lingua e questa letteratura nella più ampia parte del globo, d'istruire più di due mila persone, di spargerne il fulgore per tutte le sue principali città, di eccitare l' ammirazione e il desiderio de' suoi tesori colle pubbliche letture, cogli scritti, colle autorità, coi cataloghi degli scrittori ; difenderle, se criticate da scioli, da invidi, da ignoranti, e di elevarle a cotanta altezza, che non solamente note, ma care e pregiate divennero ai più colti e svegliati della Nazione, e a' veri amatori dell' utile e dilettevole. Consecrando per venticinque anni continui il tempo, le cure e gli studii alla gloria della mia patria, trassi da varie parti d' Europa più di 24,000 volumi di scelte opere ; e quanto di più mirabile ha l' antica e moderno italica scola nelle più gravi e astruse scienze, non che nelle belle lettere ed arti, fu recato da me negli Stati Uniti d' America, incominciando da Dante co' suoi migliori contemporanei e dall' immortal Galileo al La Grangia . . . fino alle odierne leggiadrissime produzioni.

Bernardi also quotes from an address by Da Ponte, which he says was printed in New York in 1824 with other of Da Ponte's writings. This portion of Bernardi's account of his fellow-countryman was reprinted in the *Giornale del Centenario*, and Mr. Lane¹ and others, reading it there with Bernardi's introductory note, drew from the latter the inference that Da Ponte published a series of lectures on Dante. I see no reason to believe that the following is anything but an extract from an introductory lecture to a course of readings from Dante, or Italian literature, and that it appeared in one of the miscellanies which Da Ponte published about this time.

¹ "The Dante Collections in the Harvard College and Boston Public Libraries," 1890, p. 60b.

. . . Qual obbligazione però non ha Firenze e l' Italia tutta a questo immortal cittadino per averle con quel suo meraviglioso poema data una lingua tanto perfetta, che sino dal suo cominciamento ottenne tal preminenza su tutte le altre, e l' ottenne mostrandosi capace fin dalla cuna di somministrare i materiali per un edificio sì vasto, sì nuovo, sì vario, sì sorprendente come tutti dicono essere la *Divina Commedia*?

Se però la sublimità del soggetto, la molteplicità delle materie, la lontananza de' tempi e de' fatti, e la quantità delle immagini e de' pensieri reconditi e con voci e maniere nuove spiegati; se finalmente la massa delle gravi ed astruse dottrine contenute in un testo ora mutilato ed ora variato rese in molti luoghi difficile l' intelligenza di tal poeta, fu cosa degna dei nostri maggiori, ed è simigliantemente di noi, il cercare e adottare tutti i mezzi possibili per facilitarne la intelligenza, e questo non solo per l' utilità e pel diletto che da un lavoro tanto mirabile si può trarre, ma per diffondere e manifestare in ogni tempo di più in più il merito impareggiabile d' un ingegno sì peregrino, e la nostra riconoscenza per la gloria che ricade da quello sulla nazione italiana. . . .

After sketching the rise and spread of the study of Dante in the different parts of Europe, Da Ponte concludes thus:

E che fece l' America? Mi permettano gli amici miei e della verità di darmi il vanto glorioso d' essere stato il primo a portarlo in questa città, a leggerlo a un numero ragguardevole di quegli allievi ch' ebbi la sorte di educare nella nostra lingua, a far loro gustar le bellezze maravigliose del nostro primo poeta, a far ornare le biblioteche della studiosa gioventù de' suoi preziosi volumi, come di quelli della lor propria lingua, a destare in uno de' più svegliati coltivatori della lingua italiana l' onorato desiderio di dare anche all' America una nuova traduzione di sì grand' opera.¹ Ma ciò è poco, signori, al mio vivissimo zelo per questo luminare della mia patria, è poco alla brama che nutro d' esser utile, per quanto le mie poche forze e le mie cognizioni permettono, agli abitanti onorati di una città che mi accolse graziosamente, che secondò i desiderii miei, che ricompensò e incoraggiò in varii modi le fatiche e le cure mie; è poco infine alla ben giusta gratitudine del mio core; ed è per questo che ho proposto di rendere ancor più diffusa la fama del nostro poeta, leggendolo a' colti e svegliati ingegni di New York; è per questo che assunsi il dolce ed onorevole incarico di insegnare

¹ We have no evidence of this having gone any farther than the praiseworthy desire. Anderson is probably the person to whom reference is made. For many years he held a professorship in Columbia College, and though his specialty was mathematics, he was a man of broad culture and was attracted towards literature.

la lingua creata da lui a quelli che ancor non la sanno, o che non la sanno abbastanza per intendere le varie bellezze, le profonde dottrine e gli alti misteri trattati con penna *non homini data* de tanto Genio.

Da Ponte was accorded the privilege of officiating at Columbia College in the capacity of a private tutor ; he drew no salary from the College itself, though he is commonly spoken of as having held a professorship there from 1826 to 1837. "Professor *sine exemplo*," says he, "cioè senza scolari e senza stipendio." Nevertheless he succeeded in attracting attention to his favorite theme, and in bringing into the library of that institution many Italian works in various branches of literature. The best Italian authors were represented by a collection of books which Da Ponte made and sold to the New York Society Library. Through him also the Library of Congress secured a superb edition of Dante and copies of the other most important writers of Italy. Making due allowance for Da Ponte's egotism, which sometimes prompts him to paint his own achievements in rather vivid colors, — but which is not of the unpleasant kind, — we must grant that we were the gainers by the misfortunes which drove him to this country. The change in the state of local interest in Italian literature between the time of his arrival in New York, when he could find in all that city but one book written in his native tongue, an old "Decamerone," and thirty years later, when his career was drawing to a close, must be largely attributed to his influence, even while we bear in mind the fact that the intellectual interests of the people were broadening.¹

Towards the end of his life, Da Ponte was oppressed by a constant fear of being deprived of the credit attaching to his various achievements, and of dying unwept and unhonored, — in the main, a

¹ Another cultivated Italian of a half-century ago to devote himself in his later years to teaching his native language in America was Piero Maroncelli, the fellow-prisoner of Silvio Pellico at Spielberg. For a considerable time he lived in Cambridge, Mass., and an English translation by Mrs. Andrews Norton, of Pellico's "Le mie prigioni," with Maroncelli's additions and some of his miscellaneous writings, was published there in 1836. Still another in this group was Filippo Mancinelli, who published in Philadelphia, n.d., an Italian reader for the use of his pupils. Of Pietro Bachi, the instructor in Italian at Harvard University from 1826 to 1846, I shall have something to say when I speak of Longfellow's work at Harvard.

fear destined to be realized. This strain runs through all his later writings, and one of his last publications is dedicated "a pochi dei miei allievi ed amici che si ricordano ancora di me."¹ In the preface to the same volume he utters this lament: "Io ho instruiti in 28 anni nello studio della mia lingua, che IO, E NON ALTRI, introdussi in America, duemila cinquecento persone. Duemila quattrocento e novanta quattro persone si sono dimenticate di me, e posso dire anch' io col Reale Profeta, *dereliquerunt me amici mei*." His declining years were enveloped in obscurity, and, though we cannot search out the reasons for it, we know that he died in straitened circumstances, with but few staunch friends left him. Before long the place of his burial was forgotten; to-day it is as lost as that of his former collaborator Mozart.

GEORGE TICKNOR.

George Ticknor gave an impetus to the study of Dante in this country by instituting, during his occupancy (1819-35) of the chair of modern languages at Harvard, a course of lectures and readings devoted to the *Divina Commedia* and its author. The work thus begun has been taken up in turn by such able interpreters of the best in literature as Longfellow, Lowell, and Norton, and under their care the course has naturally proved a permanent attraction among the culture studies of that university. Ticknor himself was not much concerned with the literary and historical significance of Dante's work, but was attracted rather to its linguistic interpretation. His studies were always of a linguistic and historical nature, and the notes he made on the *Divina Commedia* have to do with the word and not with the spirit of the poem.

In 1815, a young man of twenty-four, Ticknor went abroad for the purpose of study. He had already conceived an interest in the early

¹ Il Mezenzio, tragedia originale. Nuova Jorca, Joseph Desnoues, 1834. 18° pp. 77+ (2).

Italian poets, and before leaving home had sought in vain for some help in reading Dante. In Germany he met with better success: Herr Balhorn, a tutor to some royal family in Göttingen, offered to introduce him to the *Divina Commedia*. "Balhorn," says Ticknor, "knew everything about Dante. He was not fully occupied, but he could not be hired, — he was too well off to be paid in money. A brother of my friend Mr. James Savage had sent me from Hamburg a box of very fine Havana cigars, and I found that Herr Balhorn would read and explain Dante to me and consider some of those fine cigars — so rare in Germany — a full compensation; and he continued the reading certainly as long as the cigars lasted." Ticknor speaks of having a copy of Dante always with him during this early sojourn in Europe, and he continued to read and study him after his return to America.

On entering upon his professorship at Harvard, he undertook some reforms in the management of his department; thus he insisted that a speaking knowledge of the modern languages studied should always be striven for. In his spirited address on the best method of teaching the living languages, he remarks that "the great masters in all ages and in all nations have built on the same foundations, and can be successfully approached only in one way." "Who," he asks, "can be aware either of the sublimity or the tenderness of Dante unless he studies that unwritten language from which alone this first and greatest master of Italian poetry could draw his material and inspiration?" Here, perhaps, we have a partial explanation for the linguistic nature of his study of Dante.

In 1831 he was lecturing three times a week to a special class in Dante, and in one of his letters, he speaks of having spent his summer vacation in the study of this one author, devoting to him often twelve and fourteen hours a day, "with uninterrupted and equable pleasure." "If I am not a better man for it," he writes, "and a happier one, too, why I shall have misused my opportunities scandalously, as many better men have done before me."

During his second residence in Europe Mr. Ticknor had the good fortune to meet, at Dresden, Prince John of Saxony, "Philalethes," well known to Dante students, and to attend the gatherings called for the purpose of reading over and revising the first draft of Prince John's

translation.¹ The honest and candid criticism passed in this informal way upon the work in its first stage brings to mind the Wednesday evening assemblies of a generation later at Longfellow's home in

¹ In his journal for 1836, Ticknor gives the following account of those meetings:

January 8. I passed — by appointment made according to the court ceremonies — an hour this afternoon with Prince John. Nothing could be more simple and unpretending than his manners. I wanted to see him on account of his knowledge of Dante, of whose *Inferno* he has printed a translation with very good notes; and during the greater part of the time I was with him he was occupied in showing me the books and apparatus he had collected for the study of the great Italian master. Some of them were quite curious. . . . In all respects I found him well informed, in some learned, and he was truly agreeable because it was plain he desired to be so.

His establishment is very elegant and luxurious, and his study, where he received me, looked truly scholar-like and comfortable. Among other things he showed me a beautiful collection of drawings in an album, relating to Dante, which had been from time to time given to him by his family, — all original, of course, and two or three by Retzsch, of the greatest vigor and beauty, and executed in pencil with the most delicate finish.

January 20. I passed an hour this forenoon with Prince John, in looking over the *apparatus criticus* he has used in his study of Dante. It was less complete than I expected to find it, but more curious. I made a good many memoranda, and shall turn the visit to good account. He was, I thought, free in showing me everything, conscientious in confessing to some little oversights and ignorances, and glad to get any hints that will be useful to him hereafter; but, on the whole, it is quite plain his study of Dante has been most thorough, and that his knowledge and feeling of the power and beauty of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* are really extraordinary. With the *Paradiso* he has not yet made a beginning, — I mean, with its translation.

January 31. This evening Prince John invited four of us — Professor Förster,* the translator of Petrarca, Dr. Carus, Count Baudissin, and myself — to hear Tieck read a part of the unpublished translation of the *Purgatorio*. I went punctually at six. . . . After coffee and a little conversation, we all sat down at a table, and Tieck read, most admirably, five cantos, beginning with the eighteenth.† The rest of us looked over the original text, and at the end of each canto observations were made on the translation. There was not, however, one word of compliment offered, or the smallest flattery insinuated. On the contrary, errors were pointed out fairly and honestly; and once or twice, where there was a difference of opinion between the Prince and Carus, Carus adhered, even with pertinacity, to his own, which, in one case, I thought was wrong. The transla-

* Five years later, in 1841, Förster published his translation of Dante's *Vita Nuova*.

† Tieck had the reputation of being at that time the best reader in Germany.

Cambridge, where his friends were equally frank in expressing their opinions of his work. These are two delightful instances of scholarly and friendly intercourse into which small bickerings did not enter, yet from which open discussion was not excluded. A memorandum made by Mr. Ticknor many years later recalls the pleasure of those winter evenings in Dresden :

The little meetings at Prince John's were, I believe, sometimes called the "Accademia Dantesca," and extended through the years when the Prince was making his translation. I went to only two or three of them, in the winter of 1835-36, and never met anybody at them except Tieck, Carus, and Karl Förster, though I believe other persons were occasionally there, especially the Mit-Regent, afterwards King Frederic. I think there are notices of them in the Life of Förster, 1846, where I am kindly remembered as meeting him at the Prince's, which I never did except on these occasions. Förster was an excellent Italian scholar, and translated, as early as 1807, from Dante. So was Carus, who made a plan¹ of the *Divina Commedia*, of which he gave me a copy, still to be found in my large paper Landino. Tieck was not so exact in his Italian as they were, but was more genial and agreeable.

In a letter to Prince John, Ticknor speaks of Dante as a "*mare magnum* for adventure," and adds : "Every time I read him I make, or I think I make, new discoveries." He was in the habit of jotting down his favorite rendering of a word or passage on the margins of a copy of the Venice edition of 1811, which was his *vade mecum*. "I bought it in Geneva in 1817," says he to his daughter in an unpublished note of 1853, "and from that time have made my chief

tion, however, was as close as anything of the sort well can be, and in general, I have no doubt, most faithfully accurate. After the reading was over, and refreshments had been handed around, the conversation was very gay, and fell at last into downright story-telling and *commérage*.

February 20. I was engaged this evening at Tieck's, but we were both summoned to Prince John's, where, to the same party that was there before, — *viz.* Förster, Carus, and Baudissin, — Tieck read five more cantos of the Prince's translation of the *Purgatorio*, XXIV-XXIX. Everything went on just as it did before, and was equally creditable to all parties concerned in it, the criticisms being free, full, and fair, and the spirit in which they were received that of a person really disposed to profit by them.

¹ A privately printed broadside, in possession of his daughter, Miss Anna E. Ticknor, to whom I am indebted for many courtesies.

studies of Dante in it, taking it with me on my travels in Europe then and . . . in 1835-38. Add to this my manuscript notes in three quartos and you will have pretty much all I know about Dante."

The notes to which he refers were in the main the skeleton of his lectures and class-room work at Harvard; many of them are but expansions of the marginal notes in his special copy of the poem. From the fly-leaves of the three manuscript volumes we learn that the notes on the *Inferno* were prepared at Blue Hills, July and August, 1832; those on cantos i.-xxix. of the *Purgatorio* at Rome, January and February, 1837; while the remainder of the work was done at Wood's Holl in July and August, 1840. His friend, Count Circourt, had read the first two volumes, and expressed the hope that their contents would be prepared for the press; but the publication since that day of the early comments and other material then not easy of access, from which Ticknor drew, has made it needless. The notes are of interest to us only as they show the breadth of Ticknor's scholarship. The first pages are concerned with such introductory topics as the political state of Italy, the state of religious power and opinion, and of poetry and language in the time of Dante, together with a sketch of his life in which he questions some of Boccaccio's statements. Then comes a brief account of Dante's works. In his analysis of the *Divina Commedia* he puts the question, "What kind of a poem?" and makes answer that it is "no more an epic than a comedy. It is essentially historical. [The] glories and calamities of Italy, its parties, princes, and great men [are] shown in the strong light of the genius, indignation, and misfortunes, the passions, prejudices, and sufferings of one extraordinary man." Ticknor grasps a point which was often misunderstood in his day, — that is, Dante's sense of justice. It is one of the very few of Dante's personal attributes upon which he has any comment whatsoever to make. He finds proof of it in the treatment of Bocca degli Abati, of Beccaria, and of Soldanier, irrespective of party, and remarks that in each case "it was the treason Dante hated"; he also notes "a singular exhibition of it" in Dante's putting Farinata among the heretics in the sixth circle, "for though a Ghibelline and a saviour of his country, . . . he took away from the people the example of a religious chief." Of Dante's minor works, Ticknor characterizes the *Vita Nuova* as "mystical," the *De Monar-*

chia as "remarkable for its clear distinction between Church and State," the *Setti Salmi Penitenziali* as "monkish," and finds fault with the *Convito* for its "bad allegory."

RICHARD HENRY WILDE.

Another American who devoted considerable time to the study of Dante, with a view to publishing what he never lived to complete, was Richard Henry Wilde, of Georgia, who spent some four years in Italy in the study of Italian history and literature. Mr. Wilde was a man of marked strength of character and innate refinement of feeling, and as he had had no academic training he endeavored, throughout a busy legal and political life, to gain, by constant application to books, what he had missed by lacking the opportunities of instruction in youth. He is remembered chiefly for his lyric "My Life is Like a Summer Rose," and for the part he had in the discovery of the Bargello fresco popularly ascribed to Giotto. Others have taken to themselves the greater share of the honor attaching to this latter achievement. He has claim to our present consideration through his unpublished "Life and Times of Dante" and "The Italian Lyric Poets."

He was not a native of America, as has sometimes been stated, but was born in Ireland in 1789, and came to this country in 1797, spending his boyhood in Baltimore. On the death of his father the family removed to Georgia, and the young man took to the study of law in the few leisure moments left him by an exacting clerkship. His subsequent career at the bar and in Congress commands our admiration. The success with which he met enabled him to seek retirement in Italy at a comparatively early age, and he sailed for Europe in the summer of 1835. On his return he published in 1841 his work on Tasso, which was well received. Though he accepted a professorship in the law department of the newly established University of Louisiana, he still hoped to find leisure to put into shape for publication his "Life and Times of Dante," and to complete the

translations for "The Italian Lyric Poets"; but his life was brought to an untimely close by the yellow-fever epidemic of 1847.¹

It is generally understood that a preface, or foreword, should be a last word coming from the author's pen, written after he has worked over his subject from beginning to end and is best able to define his position and make his apology. When one sits down to write this proem before his book is half finished, it is pretty safe to conjecture that all does not go well with him in his task. Now, Wilde has left interesting prefaces to his two incomplete volumes. From their tone it is plainly evident that their author had serious misgivings as to the success with which his work would meet. It was more than modesty that forced him to say in regard to his experiments in translation that the frequency of like folly and the strength of the temptation would possibly secure for his effort no worse a fate than that which had attended others, — pity and neglect. In 1867, his son, William Cumming Wilde, endeavored to secure a publisher for the Dante volume, and, with the same end in view, added biographical sketches to the unfinished portions of the volume of translations. He failed, however, to find any one who would risk the expense of printing, twenty-five years after their writing, two such

¹ Among the editorials of the *Southern and Western Magazine and Review* for August, 1845, vol. ii, p. 144, a short-lived venture of William Gilmore Simms, is found this notice of Wilde's work: "We are pleased to learn that the life of Dante, by Richard Henry Wilde, of New Orleans, is in rapid preparation for the press. Mr. Wilde has had this work in hand for a considerable length of time. He has bestowed the utmost pains upon it, as well in regard to the acquisition and analysis of his material as in careful finish of his style. We have had the pleasure of hearing portions of the work read, by the accomplished writer himself, and we feel quite safe in making these assurances. Mr. Wilde has enjoyed many advantages for the preparation of this biography—has spent several years in Italy, is a master of the language, and has been an industrious explorer among its ancient records. He has been fortunate in making some valuable and interesting discoveries. A new portrait of Dante, exhibiting the stern and gloomy master, with equal felicity and truthfulness, is, we believe, due entirely to the persevering nature of his researches. We look anxiously for this work as an honorable addition to American and particularly to Southern literature." Simms himself knew Dante and translated the fifth canto of the *Inferno* into quite creditable triple-rhymed English verse.

Longfellow makes mention of Wilde ("with his white floating locks") in his journal for Oct. 2, 1845.

bulky works, left in an unfinished state and wanting in proportion. Instead of weighting the lyrics with long lives of the poets, more suited to an encyclopædia than to an anthology, the translations, which are chiefly of sonnets, ought to have been gone over carefully and printed separately. Wilde was at his best in dealing with the sonnet form; with the canzone he did not succeed so well. The following is a most satisfactory translation of a favorite sonnet from Dante's *Canzoniere* :

GUIDO VORREI CHE TU E LAPO ED IO.

Guido, I would that Lapo, thou, and I
 Were by some kind enchantment borne away
 In a brave ship that o'er the sea should fly
 And, spite of wind and tide, our will obey :
 So that ne'er fickle fortune nor foul weather
 Should interrupt our course or mar our peace,
 And living free and happily together,
 The wish to live so ever, might increase.
 Vanna and Beatrice should be there
 With her who o'er the thirty reigns supreme
 (That too should be the good enchanter's care);
 And love should be our everlasting theme, —
 As much contented they our lot to share
 As we our fate to blend with theirs, I deem.

The incompleteness of the work on "The Italian Lyric Poets" is shown by the unfinished state in which Wilde left the portion devoted to Dante. There are but two renderings beyond the one just given, and no biographical sketch. In another portion of the manuscript we find a translation of Boccaccio's difficult sonnet, which may well be given here.

DANTE ALIGHIERI SON, MINERVA OSCURA.

Dante am I, the oracle obscure
 Of wisdom and of art divinely sung,
 Who formed the accents of my mother tongue,
 To eloquence laconic, bold, and pure.

My fancy high, prompt, daring, and secure,
 Passed Tartarus, and up to Heaven sprung,
 And o'er the story of my journey flung
 A beauty destined ever to endure.
 Florence my glorious mother was, to me
 More like a step-dame, though her loving child, —
 The fault of civil strife and calumny.
 Ravenna gave me shelter when exiled,
 And keeps my dust ; my soul to God on high
 Rose from its earthly prison undefiled.

The "Life and Times of Dante" was planned to consist of two volumes, but no more than the first was ever written. The manuscript consists of about eight hundred closely written quarto sheets, the last of which is dated Oct. 10, 1842. As it stands, it deals more with the times in which Dante lived than with his life. A score of appendices, to which references are made throughout the volume, are lost or were never written.

Though even more unsuited for publication to-day than in 1867, the work is of interest to us as outlining methods of research quite common in America half a century ago, and in helping us to appreciate the growth of American scholarship in this particular field. In order to get Wilde's own account of what he endeavored to do, I print a considerable portion of the preface to his "Life and Times of Dante":

During a residence of some years in Florence, I had more leisure on my hands than a busy life ever before allowed me. Part of it was occupied with the study of Italian literature. As an exercise in translation and composition I wrote the "Researches and Conjectures on the Love and Madness of Tasso," and, while thus engaged, anxiously endeavored to obtain access to the Medicean archives, with the hope of finding some inedited letters, of his own and others, bearing on his story. The desired permission was not obtained soon enough for my purpose. It came to me at length, unexpectedly, through the gracious indulgence of His Imperial and Royal Highness, the Grand Duke of Tuscany, and the courtesy of his ministers, among whom I am especially indebted to His Excellency Don Neri de' Principi Corsini, Secretary of State. . . . I was then engaged in translating specimens of the Italian lyric poets, and composing short biographical notices of each author ; and, being much puzzled with the obscurities and contradictions abounding in the ordinary lives of Dante,

it occurred to me to seek in the archives thus fortunately opened to my curiosity whatever explanations they might afford. . . .

My first step was the study of an alphabet and the still more cramped and crabbed abbreviations of the notaries of the Signoria, a sort of official shorthand which constantly varied, as each officer used his own. . . . I threw aside everything else and devoted myself assiduously to the business of collecting and extracting. . . .

Confident in my own resources, like an American woodsman, with my axe on my shoulder, I entered the forest. Never, most assuredly, since I bivouacked in my boyhood amid a wilderness lately in the possession of the Indians, beside a rousing fire, the earth for my bed, the sky my canopy, a saddle for my pillow, and a blanket to cover me, — never since then did so deep a sense of my own insignificance and the enduring solitude of ages come over me as in my first visit to the Florentine archives. Suites of rooms whose large size and immense height would befit a royal palace, crammed with books and folio files of papers from top to bottom, filled me at once with wonder and despair. From this enormous mine the history of centuries had been extracted, and yet, like mountain quarries out of which cities have arisen, the materials were not missed, the mass was undiminished. . . .

For some time, like a child in a blooming meadow, I wearied myself grasping at everything, weeds as well as flowers, entirely unconscious of their respective value, until my hands were full and my eyes still greedy. It soon became clear, however, that some one object embracing a very limited period must be selected or my efforts would be merely a waste of labor. The life of Dante was chosen, and as materials increased, his times were added.

Here one already sees the mark of the dilettante. Wilde never reached the point of trained scholarship and discrimination so necessary to the investigator and historian. He had a great fund of enthusiasm, and, as Washington Irving said of him, he went about his work with all the "patience and accuracy of a case hunter." In fact, he shows himself the advocate by the eagerness with which he supports his favorite theories in the case of certain vexed questions. Not that he was a biased investigator, nor that he was unwilling to give up a cherished tradition, once overthrown; but until disproved, the pleasing figments of time had for him the usual attraction they hold alike for the poet and dilettante, and Wilde was somewhat of both. But to return to his narrative.

While endeavoring to become familiar with the writings of the ancient records, I employed my mornings at the Riformagioni, in reading the general index literally through. Many references stimulated my curiosity and were carefully noted, but the general result was a severe trial to my patience, ending in disappointment. This and various other indices I found were framed, as it is proper they should be, rather for the present administrative purposes of the government than the gratification of historical or antiquarian tastes. Accordingly they are most diffuse where I could have wished them concise, and brief where the greatest minuteness would have been acceptable. My first experiments of this sort convinced me fully that if I really wished to explore the ground faithfully, there was nothing for it but examine page by page and document by document every book and file that related to my epoch. This was a serious task, and threatened to occupy me, as in fact it did, for years. Besides, I gradually became aware how utterly unqualified I was for my pursuit. Conversation with the archivists and with various other persons of talent and education, lovers of Dante, and skilled in the history of their country, who were patient and urbane enough to listen to my crude notions, and answer all my vague and random questions, soon convinced me how much I had to learn. It was absolutely necessary that I should inform myself as far as possible of all that had already been published or written in relation to my subject. Unwilling wholly to forego an examination of the archives, lest accident should close them on me forever, yet sensible that there were many books to be read, and in the public libraries many manuscripts to be consulted, before I could tell what had been already found, what was still to seek, and what had often been sought in vain, I resolved to make a threefold distribution of my time. Two or three hours of the morning, usually from nine to twelve, were given to the Riformagioni. As soon as my eyes became weary with the crabbed and sometimes faded characters of ancient parchments, I betook myself to the Magliabecchiana and remained until two, reading manuscripts in a more modern hand. My afternoons and evenings were devoted to the *Commedia* and other works of Dante, to Compagni, Villani, Malispini, Boccaccio, Benvenuto da Imola, Muratori, Ammirato, Tiraboschi, Andres, Lami, Pelli, Arrivabene, and a hundred others, many of whose works I read again and again, and of some made a constant and profound study.

. . . Had I begun with a full understanding of the achievements of my learned predecessors, assuredly I should have gone no farther. How often afterward, in studying the many and huge-tomed *Spogli* and *Zibaldoni* of Ferdinando Migliore, Cosimo della Rena, Senator Carlo di Tommaso Strozzi, Gammurini, the anonymous volumes erroneously attributed to

Borghini, and various similar collections, has the cold and bitter feeling of despondency overcome me, with the self-interrogation : What after all this can I hope to effect? Here are men who lived and died in the process of investigating and extracting, and after amassing this immense quantity of material have finished comparatively little. My ignorance thus again stood my friend, until I waded so far into my undertaking that to desist would have been more vexatious than to proceed, and I went on with dogged obstinacy, borrowing courage from despair. . . .

I examined everything belonging to my era in the archives, line by line. Hence the fortunate discovery of a record establishing Dante's services as one of the secret council, and his votes against furnishing troops to Boniface VIII, which, strange and almost incredible to say, had escaped all my predecessors. Hence various other discoveries enabling me, as I hope, to arrange and elucidate the order of events during a short, but most perplexed, period of Florentine history, whose confusion all had admitted and despaired of correcting. Hence a vindication in many points of the old biographers and commentators, most unjustly censured. Hence the identification of one of the young men poisoned during the faction of 1300, — Pigello Portinari, as a brother of Beatrice and a friend of Dante. . . . Hence the satisfactory solution of that hitherto unsettled question, — the poet's Roman virtue in recommending the banishment of his best friend, Guido Cavalcanti, and the full conviction of his own innocence, and the iniquity of the sentence passed upon him by his enemies. . . .

The systematic searching which has been going on during recent years has brought to light all that Wilde was able to turn up, and a great deal more. The indefatigable Del Lungo has it nearly all in his masterpiece of scholarly editing and annotation, "*La Cronica di Dino Compagni*." Wilde, however, came to some novel conclusions in regard to the Pigello Portinari mentioned by Villani, and I give them here for what they may be worth. Wilde has just been discussing the poisoning, at the hands of Ser Neri degli Abati, of some of the young men imprisoned in default of the fines imposed upon them for taking part in the faction fight at Remole. Ser Neri was one of the keepers of the Paliазze, the prison of the nobles.

Among the innocent victims of Ser Neri degli Abati's base and murderous treason was one of the family of Portinari. Giovanni Villani identifies him by his Christian name, but no one has yet remarked, or at least no one has yet proved, that this Pigello de' Portinari was certainly, or almost certainly,

a brother of Dante's Beatrice, and possibly, the very brother who was the poet's intimate friend. . . .

Folco de Portinari, the father of Beatrice, was the founder of the celebrated hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, in Florence, and his will has been preserved. Besides his daughter and other children, he mentions in it his sons Pigello, Gherardo, and Jacobo, at that time (1287) all minors. Of these Pigello was no doubt the eldest, as they would naturally be named in the order of seniority; but without some more definite evidence of his age it must always remain uncertain whether he was not too young in 1298 to take part in these unhappy factions. This proof has been anxiously sought for and at length found. In 1294 a resolution of the Priori subrogated to Pigello di Folco Portinari and others all the rights of the Comune against Dino Ubertini, for whom they became security, and on account of which a sentence was rendered on the seventh of the previous December. Before December, 1294, therefore, Pigello was of age; and his identity is fully established by his being called Pigello di Folco, — that is to say, according to the Florentine usage, "the son of Folco." Even the ambiguity that would arise upon the gratuitous supposition that there might be another Folco de' Portinari at the time is removed by the word "quondam," showing that the deceased Folco was intended. To suppose two Folchi, both deceased and both leaving sons called Pigello, at the same epoch, is an outrage on all probability which receives no countenance from the records of the time. In none of these has any other Folco or Pigello been observed, though both names were afterwards continued in the family. The latter, indeed, is by no means a common baptismal appellation, and has been remarked only once besides, in the person of Pigello de' Cerchi, whose house was doubtless allied to the Portinari by marriage. The Canonico Cavaliere Folco Antonio Maria de' Portinari, therefore, who compiled the memoirs of his family, . . . though he enters into no critical examination of the facts, adopts without hesitation the Pigello de' Portinari spoken of by Giovanni Villani as the son of Folco mentioned in his will.

There are many other passages in this work which are well worth printing, but they are mostly concerned with the times leading up to Dante, and with matter introductory to a consideration of the poet himself. The scope of the present sketch does not permit of the fuller presentation of material from these interesting manuscripts. Before leaving Wilde, however, we must review the part he had in the discovery in 1840 of the portrait of Dante, to which reference has already been made.

As there has been so much discussion concerning the division of the credit attaching to the discovery of the Giotto fresco, it is to be regretted that we do not have Wilde's own account of the movement which we have all reason to believe was set on foot by him. All that he says of the matter in the body of his work is that "the circumstances attending the recovery of the fresco, which have been differently related, according to the self-love of every narrator, are thought worthy of preservation as matters of history, and have therefore been embodied in the appendix." Though the latter is unhappily lost, we have a disinterested account of the undertaking by Washington Irving, who wrote of the discovery in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* for October, 1841. The details of his narrative are corroborated, as far as they go, by the letter from Signor Bezzi, to which we shall come shortly.

It was during the time he was devoting himself to Tasso, says Irving, that Wilde first heard of the probable existence of the Giotto fresco. His informer was Carlo Liverati, a Florentine artist of some merit, who spoke with regret of the almost utter hopelessness of its recovery. Wilde thought little of the matter at the time, but a few years later, when engaged in the study of Dante, it was again brought to his attention, and this time aroused his deepest interest. In reading Domenico Moreni's notes on Filelfo's "Vita Dantis," he found mention of the Giotto fresco, and he also learned that, some years previously, Luigi Scotti, keeper of the drawings in the royal galleries at Florence, had made "an ineffectual attempt to set on foot a project for the recovery of the lost treasure."¹ "Here," continues Irving, "was a new vein of inquiry, which Wilde followed up with his usual energy and sagacity." The remainder is best told in Irving's own words :

For a moment he felt an impulse to undertake the enterprise ; but feared that, in a foreigner from a new world, any part of which is unrepresented at the Tuscan court, it might appear like an intrusion. He soon, however,

¹ Moreni's note is as follows : "Il nostro pittore Sig. Luigi Scotti ha veduta, ed esaminata essa Cappella, e avendovi scorta qualche traccia indubitata di pittura, egli stesso colla sua già nota pazienza non sarebbe alieno, qualora gli fosse ordinato, di far risorgere essa pittura, e con essa il Ritratto del nostro immortal Poeta, di cui al certo non avremmo il più antico nè il più simigliante."— *Vita Dantis*, Florentiae, 1828, pp. 123, 124.

found a zealous coadjutor. This was one Giovanni Aubrey Bezzi, a Piedmontese exile, who had long been a resident in England, and was familiar with its language and literature. . . . Signor Bezzi partook deeply of the enthusiasm of his countrymen for the memory of Dante, and sympathized with Mr. Wilde in his eagerness to retrieve, if possible, the lost portrait. They had several consultations as to the means to be adopted to effect their purpose, without incurring the charge of undue officiousness. To lessen any objections that might occur, they resolved to ask for nothing but permission to search for the fresco painting at their own expense; and should any remains of it be found, then to propose to the nobility and gentry of Florence an association for the purpose of completing the undertaking, and effectually recovering the lost portrait.

For the same reason, the formal memorial addressed to the Grand Duke was drawn up in the name of the Florentines, among whom were the celebrated Bartolini, President of the School of Sculpture in the Imperial and Royal Academy, Signor Paolo Ferroni, of the noble family of that name, who has exhibited considerable talent for painting, and Signor Gasparini, also an artist. This petition was urged and supported with indefatigable zeal by Signor Bezzi; and being warmly countenanced by Count Nerli, and other functionaries, met with more prompt success than had been anticipated. Signor Marini, a skilful artist, who had succeeded in similar operations, was employed to remove the whitewash by a process of his own, by which any fresco painting that might exist beneath it would be protected from injury. He set to work patiently and cautiously. In a short time he met with evidence of the existence of the fresco. From under the coat of whitewash the head of an angel gradually made its appearance, and was pronounced to be by the pencil of Giotto.

The enterprise was now prosecuted with increased ardor. Several months were expended on the task, and three sides of the chapel wall were uncovered; they were all painted in fresco by Giotto with the history of the Magdalene, exhibiting her conversion, her penance, and her beatification.¹ The figures, however, were all those of saints and angels: no historical portraits had yet been discovered, and doubts began to be entertained whether there were any. Still the recovery of an indisputable work of Giotto's was considered an ample reward for any toil; and the Ministers of the Grand Duke, acting under his directions, assumed on his behalf the past charges and future management of the enterprise.

¹ Only a portion of the fresco is devoted to this theme; that in which Dante's portrait occurs is a Gloria and is usually spoken of as the "Paradiso." There has been much discussion as to what part Giotto had in its painting.

At length, on the uncovering of the fourth wall, the undertaking was crowned with complete success. A number of historical figures were brought to light, and among them the undoubted likeness of Dante. . . .

It is not easy to appreciate the delight of Mr. Wilde and his coadjutors at this triumphant result of their researches; nor the sensation produced, not merely in Florence, but throughout Italy by this discovery of a veritable portrait of Dante, in the prime of his days. It was some such sensation as would be produced in England by the sudden discovery of a perfectly well-authenticated likeness of Shakspeare, with a difference in intensity proportioned to the superior sensitiveness of the Italians.¹

It were useless to go all over the ground of the scattered discussion which took place between 1840 and 1850, as to who was the prime mover in the undertaking in question.² Signor Bezzi and "Baron" Kirkup looked after the details of uncovering the fresco, and later on, Kirkup, in the absence of both Bezzi and Wilde, took to himself the credit for everything. Kirkup unquestionably deserves to be remembered with gratitude for having given us his invaluable water-color sketch of the Dante portrait before it suffered from "restoration," but his attempt to deprive his associates of their just share of the honor attaching to the discovery was most niggardly.³ On some of the

¹ "The enthusiasm of the Florentines on the announcement of the discovery resembled that of their ancestors when Borgo Allegri received its name from the rejoicings in sympathy with Cimabue. 'L'abbiamo, il nostra poeta!' was the universal cry, and for days afterwards the Bargello was thronged with a continuous succession of pilgrim visitors."—Lord Lindsay, *Christian Art*, 2d ed., London, 1886, vol. ii, p. 11.

² The chief documents in the case, so far as I know them, are as follows: Eugenio Latilla's unsigned article in the *Athenæum*, Dec. 25, 1847, pp. 1328, 1329, and a further note in the issue for May 6, 1848, p. 467, in answer to the statement of Bezzi's case in the issue for Feb. 5, 1848, p. 146; Kirkup's letter in the *Spectator*, May 11, 1850, vol. xxiii, p. 452, answered by Bezzi in the issue for May 25, 1850, vol. xxiii, pp. 493, 494, reprinted in the *International Monthly Magazine* (N. Y.), July, 1850, vol. i, pp. 2-4. For Rudolf Lehman's recently asserted and very amusing claim to the discovery, see Leader Scott's letter in the *Athenæum*, Mar. 30, 1895, pp. 414, 415.

³ An interesting personage in his way, he was for nearly half a century a prominent figure in the English colony at Florence. Miss Wilde writes me that she has often heard "Baron" Kirkup described by her father as "a clever but rather unscrupulous man, artistic and literary, but shallowly so." The Hawthornes have left accounts of him in their journals for August, 1858.

engravings which he caused to be made of his sketch, he styled himself the first promoter of the discovery, and on others the discoverer of the portrait. In his garbled account, Kirkup spoke of Bezzi's work as "fruitless," though he granted that the latter had undertaken all the labors of the petition. He claimed that it was himself who told Bezzi of the existence of the fresco, and that Bezzi voluntarily united with him for the necessary expenses and steps to recover it. "The day after," says Kirkup, "he came to propose the junction of another person of my acquaintance for this object. This was Mr. Wilde, an American, whom I accepted with pleasure as our associate in the affair." This is the only mention he makes of Wilde. Bezzi tells quite a different story. Witness the following :

It was Mr. Wilde and not Mr. Kirkup who first spoke to me of this buried treasure. Mr. Wilde, an American gentleman respected by all that knew him, was then in Florence, engaged in a work on Dante and his times, which unfortunately he did not live to complete. Among the materials he had collected for this purpose there were some papers of the antiquarian Moreni, which he was examining when I called one day (I had then been three or four months in Florence) to read what he had already written, as I was in the habit of doing from time to time. It was then that a footnote of Moreni's met his eye, in which the writer lamented that he had spent two years of his life in unceasing and unavailing efforts to recover the portrait of Dante, and the other portions of the fresco of Giotto in the Bargello, mentioned by Vasari; that others before him had been equally anxious and equally unsuccessful; and that he hoped that better times would come (*verranno tempi migliori*), and that the painting, so interesting both in an artistic and historical point of view, would be again sought for, and at last recovered. I did not then understand how the efforts of Moreni and others could have been thus unsuccessful; and I thought that with common energy and diligence they might have ascertained whether the painting, so clearly pointed out by Vasari, was or was not in existence; several months, however, of wearisome labors in the same pursuit taught me to judge more leniently of the failures of my predecessors. Mr. Wilde put Moreni's note before me, and suggested and urged, that being an Italian by birth, though not a Florentine, and having lived many years in England and among the English, I had it in my power to bring two modes of influence to bear upon the research; and that such being the case I ought to undertake it. My thoughts immediately turned to Mr. Kirkup, an artist who had abandoned his art to devote himself

entirely to antiquarian pursuits, with whom I was well acquainted, and who, having lived many years in Florence (I believe, fifteen), would weigh the value of Moreni's testimony on this matter, and effectually assist me in every way if I took it in hand. So I called upon him, either the same day or the next; and I found that he, like most other people, had read the passage in Vasari's life of Giotto, in which it is explicitly said that the portrait of Dante had been painted with others in the Palazzo del Podestà, and was to be seen at the time the historian was writing; but that he had not read or had not put any confidence in the note of the Florence edition of Vasari published in 1832-38, in which it is stated that the Palazzo del Podestà had now become a prison — the Bargello; that the chapel had been turned into a *dispensa* (it was more like a coal-hole where the rags and much of the filth of the prison was deposited); that the walls of this *dispensa* exhibited nothing but a dirty coating, and that Moreni speaks of the painting in some published work.

Mr. Kirkup, however ignorant, or culpably negligent, or a little of both, he might previously have been on the subject, yet when I brought it before him, he at once admitted its importance and made a liberal offer of money, if any should be needed, to carry out the experiment. Thus encouraged by Mr. Wilde and Mr. Kirkup, I sought out and found among English, American, and Italian friends and acquaintances many that were ready to assist the plan. Then it was that I drew up a memorial to the Grand Duke; not because I am an "advocate," as your correspondent [Mr. Kirkup] is pleased to call me, for that is not the case, but simply because, having taken pains to organize the means of working out the common object, the coöperators thought I could best represent what this common object was. . . . The answer was favorable, and I was referred to Marchese Nerli, and to the Director of the Academy to make the necessary arrangements.

If these accounts by Irving and Bezzi do nothing else, they assuredly make invalid the too common statement that the fresco was discovered by Kirkup. Bezzi was given credit for his management of the affair by Mrs. Jameson, by Eastlake in his notes to "Kugler's Handbook of Painting," and by Landor in a letter to the London *Examiner*, Aug. 16, 1840. Wilde's part in the undertaking has been largely lost sight of. Crowe and Cavalacaselle speak of "the willingness of an intelligent American, Mr. Henry Wild" [*sic*], to assist in getting the permission of the government authorities; but most writers, including Alessandro D'Ancona, Lord Lindsay, F. G.

Stephens, H. Quilter, and the makers of many of the encyclopædias of art and of biography, in referring to the discovery, make no mention of Wilde, even as a party to the undertaking. Yet, as Bezzi said in a letter printed in the *Athenæum*, Feb. 5, 1848, "it was originally and principally at the suggestion and by the encouragement of Mr. Wilde" that he endeavored to secure permission from the government, and coöperation among interested individuals. Though it seems impossible to-day to determine exactly how much each of the three had to do with the affair in its inception, yet the statements here brought together certainly call for a more equal distribution of the honor attaching to the discovery.

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW.

Although the early American students of Dante were not without their influence in creating a local and limited interest in their author, yet they left but little lasting incitement to the study of him. They did not succeed in bringing Dante before the American reading public, or in giving him the audience he merited. To Longfellow this honor chiefly belongs. No one in America has done so much in the service of this master. The homage paid by the first of our poets to Italy's chiefest singer of rhymes is a significant bond of union.

Longfellow's interest in modern languages and literature began with his student days at Bowdoin College. In one of his letters to his father he speaks of his intention to understand French pretty thoroughly before leaving Bowdoin, and looks forward to spending a year at Harvard in the study of history and polite literature, hoping at the same time to study Italian, without which he felt that he would "be shut out from one of the most beautiful departments of letters." After graduation, instead of going to Cambridge, he went abroad to prepare himself for a professorship in his *alma mater*. During the period of his foreign study it was the modern languages which absorbed his attention,¹ and his first publications, on entering upon

¹ Longfellow took his first Italian lessons in Paris in 1826 from De' Ferranti, "guitarist to his majesty, the *Roi des Belges*." (Journal, Oct. 31, 1846.)

his duties at Bowdoin, were connected with his class-room work in French, Spanish, and Italian.

Longfellow early took to the translating as well as the writing of poetry. Diffident at the start as to the publication of verse of his own composing, he felt surer of his work when the expression alone was his and the thought itself belonged to some poet of a foreign tongue. Yet he did not worship his exotic author with such a religious zeal as to attempt to transfer his very word and phrase. He had found where the difficulties of translating lay, and he sought to give the effect of the original by a free handling of his material. In the preface to his translation of the "Coplas" of Don Jorge Manrique, published in 1833, he compared the art of the translator to that of the sculptor, who, unable to represent in the cold marble the living beauty of the human eye, has recourse to such devices as sinking the eye deeper and making the brow above it more prominent than it is in the living model, thus gaining more of the effect of the original than he could have done by an exact copy. So with the translator, said the young Longfellow: "As there are certain beauties of thought and expression in a good original which cannot be represented in the less flexible material of another language, he, too, at times may be permitted to transgress the rigid truth of language, and remedy the defect, as far as such defect can be remedied, by slight and judicious embellishments." Therefore he felt justified in occasionally making use of "an additional epithet or a more forcible turn of expression." This was where the young translator erred. His verse was graceful, his rhythm true, but he often fell short of the simplicity of his original through the liberties he allowed himself. Such a straightforward and unaffected epitome of life as

Partimos quando nascemos,
Andamos mientras vivimos,
Y allegamos
Al tiempo, que fenescemos ;
Asi que quando morimos,
Descansamos.

becomes modernized by him into the pretty but sentimental lines :

Our cradle is the starting-place,
In life we run the onward race,

And reach the goal,
 When in the mansions of the blest
 Death leaves to its eternal rest
 The weary soul.

Fortunately he did not long indulge himself in this license. We shall see how, later in life, his views concerning the ethics of the translator's art were radically changed. His "Voices of the Night," published but six years after the above, contain three fragments from the *Purgatorio*, which evince more than the beginning of the change. With a certain justice he always allowed himself greater freedom in translating from the lyric poets than from Dante, but the excuse for this is apparent.

As the successor of Professor Ticknor at Harvard College, it fell to Longfellow's lot to lecture on Dante, among other topics. Longfellow made Dante far more of a literary study for the pupils than his predecessor had done. He left the linguistic work to the competent instructor Bachi, who drilled the young men in the rudiments of Italian and read with them many of the best writers. "Before the college course was over," says the Rev. Edward Everett Hale, one of his students, "Longfellow read, nominally as lectures, the whole of Dante with us, and we were well prepared for this by what we had read with Bachi."¹

"I was so fortunate," wrote Mr. Hale to the editor of the *Christian Union* in 1881, "as to be in the first section which Mr. Longfellow

¹ In a letter of recent date, Mr. Hale writes me as follows: "Do not let your notice of Dante in Cambridge pass without fitting reference to Pietro Bachi, who was the Italian teacher from 1826 to 1846. Bachi was a well-educated Italian gentleman, who came over here, — I know not why, for I always thought he must have been wretched here. But everybody liked him, not to say loved him. It was understood amongst us youngsters that he had married a wife who was in some sort inferior to him in social position. I do not know how this was, but I do know that he never seemed to visit freely in general society, as, for instance, Bokum did, who was the German teacher. What I do know is that we all had a great regard for him, and that his work in the Italian department was excellent. As a critic of Dante, he had exactly the gift which a good teacher ought to have in interesting wide-awake young men in this study. And I can say to you that when we came to hear Longfellow lecture, we were more than prepared for his lectures by the very thorough work which Bachi had done in this same subject with us."

instructed personally when he came to Cambridge in 1836. Perhaps I best illustrate the method of his instruction when I say that I think every man in that section would now say that he was on intimate terms with Mr. Longfellow. From the first he chose to take with us the relation of a personal friend a few years older than we were. . . . Besides [directing the department of modern languages] he lectured on authors or more general subjects. I think attendance was voluntary, but I know we never missed a lecture. I have full notes of his lectures on Dante's *Divina Commedia*, which confirm my recollections, namely, that he read the whole to us in English and explained whatever he thought needed comment. I have often referred to these notes since, and though I suppose that he included all that he thought worth while in his notes to his translation of Dante, I know that until that was published I could find no such reservoir of comment on the poem." For nearly twenty years Longfellow continued this classroom work, and the suggestion of translating the whole of the *Divina Commedia* probably came to him while thus explaining the poem to beginners in Italian literature. Certain it is that the fragmentary translations, to which we have referred, were written, with others of favorite passages, in an interleaved copy of the poem, used as a note-book for his lectures and class-room readings from Dante. Longfellow's journal during this time contains many scattered references to his growing interest in Dante. With increasing years and ripening appreciation, the full significance of the life and work of the great Florentine grew upon him. From the position of a much esteemed author, Dante came to be an important factor in Longfellow's inmost life. Early in the forties he began, with the *Purgatorio*, the systematic translating of the *Commedia*, and though he was to lay it aside for many years before he resumed the task and carried it to completion, the spirit of his work was always the same. In a letter of 1843 he speaks of "the divine Dante" with whom he was accustomed to begin the morning.

His next ten years were years of fruitful activity in original work. The translating from the *Purgatorio* was suspended for the time being, yet Dante was never far from his thoughts, as his sonnet of 1848, his translation of Schelling's essay on the *Divina Commedia*, and the continued notes in his journal go to show. In the latter part of 1852 there

came over Longfellow a sense of intellectual exhaustion, and he felt that he might as well put his lyre aside. "It seems to me that I shall never write anything more," said he. In 1853 he wrote but one poem. On the first day of February of that year he has this to record: "In weariness of spirit and despair of writing anything original, I turned again to-day to dear old Dante, and resumed my translation of the *Purgatorio* where I had left it in 1843. I find great delight in the work. It diffused its benediction through the day." For a week or two a canto was translated almost daily, thus finishing the *Purgatorio*,—the only literary event in this year of his life. But a period of active original production speedily followed, and the translation of the *Divina Commedia* was suspended for another space of almost ten years. It is to be noted that as when in the creative mood Longfellow translated but little or nothing, so when devoting himself to Dante he held his powers of original composition in abeyance.

The tragic death of Longfellow's wife in 1861 meant for him a break not only in his work but in his very life. The deep undercurrent of the man's nature showed itself to but few; he was "to the eyes of others, outwardly, calm; but inwardly bleeding to death." We could ask for no more convincing proof of what Dante meant to Longfellow than that in this time of need he resumed his work upon the translation. We have no words of his own telling of the consolation he found there; the subject was too sacred for him to write of even in his journal. There is an indirect reference to it in the first of the sonnets prefaced to his translation. He compares the *Divina Commedia* to a vast cathedral and says:

I enter here from day to day,
And leave my burden at this minster gate.

He soon became absorbed in his Dante and received new courage from communing with him. Whole fortnights were given up to nothing but the translation, and within a few months after the work was fully under way, he was able to record its completion in the rough. Then came the labor of polishing and revising, with which he was to be occupied for several years. This portion of his task became irksome to him; he says that he sometimes felt tempted to

inscribe upon his work the line found upon an oar cast on the coast of Iceland, —

Oft var ek dasa dur ek dro thick.

Oft was I weary when I tugged at thee.

And then again he writes: "How I am weary of correcting and weighing and criticising my translation! It takes more time than it did to make it." He had gone over his translation very carefully so as to have it "all of one piece," and after he received the proof from the printer he went over it again to note possible lapses from the literal sense of Dante's words. In the latter revision he enjoyed the helpful coöperation of his friends, Mr. Lowell and Mr. Norton, with the occasional counsel of George W. Greene, James T. Fields, William Dean Howells, and others. From September, 1865, to May, 1867, Longfellow devoted his Wednesday evenings to the giving of final touches, and he was at home to all who cared to hear him read a canto from his proof sheets and to take part in the general criticism of his work. There is no question as to the benefit which Longfellow derived from the meetings of this "Dante Club," as they called the informal gatherings. Not only were changes made in the translation on the basis of suggestions offered, but the friendly interest shown in the undertaking also lessened the tedium of revision; an air of charming conviviality was cast about these meetings, and Longfellow took heart and soon could speak of the Dante Club as going "singing on its way."

In 1865 the six hundredth anniversary of Dante's birth was celebrated in Florence, and attracted wide attention wherever the poet's works were esteemed. Of the many publications issued in honor of the event, four were sent out from America, — Professor Norton's essay "On the Original Portraits of Dante," Professor Botta's "Dante as Philosopher, Patriot, and Poet," Dr. Parsons' "Seventeen Cantos of the *Inferno*," and the privately printed text of Longfellow's translation of the *Inferno*. The books were sent to George P. Marsh, the well-known scholar, who was at that time the American Minister to Italy. In forwarding Longfellow's volume to the Italian committee in charge of the centenary, Mr. Marsh wrote: "I am persuaded that the committee will receive this first American reproduction of the great poem — a translation most valuable as well for

its felicity of expression as for the exactness with which my distinguished compatriot has had the ability to render, in a language so foreign to that of the original, the thought of Dante's sovereign genius—as a contribution most fitting the solemnity of the centenary, and at the same time as a worthy homage from the New World to one of the chief glories of the country of its discoverer."

The next year, 1866, saw the private issuing of the translation of the *Purgatorio*, and the following year that of the *Paradiso*. During the early part of 1867 the three volumes were published, with the addition of notes and illustrative material. They were awaited with interest by all who knew of their preparation. Shortly before their appearance, the historian Milman wrote: "We may expect great things from one who has added so much to our English poetry, and has such varied command of our language." When the volumes were finally launched, they attracted immediate and widespread attention. To one friend Longfellow writes: "The only merit my book has is that it is exactly what Dante says, and not what the translator imagines he might have said if he had been an Englishman. In other words, while making it rhythmic, I have endeavored to make it also as literal as a prose translation." He sends the books to his old friend Ferdinand Freiligrath, and in a note says: "Of what I have been through during the last six years, I dare not venture to write even to you; it is almost too much for any man to bear and live. I have taken refuge in this translation of the Divine Comedy."

With the exception of the sonnets prefacing each canticle, there is in the entire work no word of introduction or explanation, nothing to tell of the translator's aim or motive. Longfellow at first thought of three poems of homage as fly-leaf mottoes for the three parts of the *Commedia*,—translations of single sonnets by Boccaccio and Michael Angelo, and a new sonnet of his own composing. Later on he changed his plan and wrote for us the six superb sonnets which express so nobly his feelings towards Dante. These sonnets are masterpieces of construction built on the Italian rhyme scheme; four of them are fashioned after the strictest type. One must search long to find their equal for technique, thought, and imagery. They are the only personal notes in the three copious volumes, and must

serve as preface and apology. Though we should have been only too glad to have had from the poet's pen a connected account of his study of Dante, we have been able to draw from his scattered references to the subject all that we need know, and we can count ourselves more than repaid by having these poems in little which speak so much.

Longfellow had no ambition to shine as a commentator on Dante ; he was concerned only with the translation of the poet, and the notes he made for his work were almost entirely for purposes of illustration. He drew a very sharp line between translation and comment. In his "Table-Talk" he gives it as his opinion that "the business of a translator is to report what his author says, not to explain what he means : that is the work of the commentator. What an author says and how he says it — that is the problem of the translator."¹ Passages permitting of two interpretations in the original retain their double significance in Longfellow's rendition. The ambiguous saying of Francesca —

Ma solo un punto fu quel che ci vinse —

is allowed to remain equally ambiguous :

But one point only was it that o'ercame us.

The translator does not consider it his office to say whether *punto* means a point in time or a point in Lanciotto's tale ; he leaves the decision to the commentator and the reader. Wherever possible Longfellow adopts a locution with as manifold a significance as Dante's own words, and thus gives us the privilege of interpreting for ourselves.²

¹ Life, 1891, vol. iii, p. 411.

² This some would claim as a fault, arguing that ambiguity is a defect in composition which the translator should avoid reproducing by the exercise of his judgment in the selection of an expression giving the most probable meaning of his author. An early exponent of the school of literalists was M. Huet, Bishop of Avranches, who, in his "De optimo genere interpretandi" [London, 1684, p. 27], gives a rule supporting the custom which Longfellow follows: *Verbum ambiguum dictum est, et duplicem admittit explicationem. Certe res in medio posita ut erat, ita debuit consistere, et verbum anceps ancipiti verbo reddi, ipsaque sententia ambiguitas representari.*

On the appearance of the completed work, George Ticknor wrote a letter of appreciation, in which he touched on a point of great moment in treating of the merits of any translation. "Whether you have not encumbered yourself," said he, "with heavier and more embarrassing conditions than permit the free poetical movement which an absolutely English reader covets, is a question which must be settled by the popular voice as separate from that of scholastic lovers of Dante. On that bench of judges I can never be competent to sit; I shall always read your translation with the original ringing in my ears." The question arises, was Ticknor right in thinking that his intimate acquaintance with the text of Dante disqualified him as a critic of Longfellow's work? Who are to decide whether the translator has done his work faithfully and well? Is a translation to stand only upon so much of its merit as can be seen by the reader who knows not the original? I take it that qualifications of as varied a nature are needed for the passing of a safe judgment upon a rendering of Dante as those Matthew Arnold asked of the tribunal to which he would bring a verse translation of Homer. That ringing of the original in his ears, which Ticknor thought incapacitated him, would in my opinion be the first essential of a competent judge; but with this scholarly attainment there must go critical acumen and poetical feeling. Lowell, in whom these requisites were combined in a marked degree, but who had no great fondness for foreign works done into English, regarded Longfellow's translation "not as the best possible, by any means, but as the best probable." "Nobody who is intimate with the original," says he in one of his letters, "will find any translation of the Divine Comedy more refreshing than *cobs*. Has not Dante himself told us that no poetry can be translated? But after all is said, I think Mr. Longfellow's the best thus far, as being the most accurate. It is to be looked on, I think, as measured prose — like our version of Job, for example, though without the mastery of measure in which our Bible translators are unmatched except by Milton; I mean where they are at their best, as in Job, the songs of Deborah and Barak, the death of Sisera, and some parts of the Psalms. Mr. Longfellow is not a scholar in the German sense of the word, — that is to say, he is no pedant; but he certainly *is* a scholar in another and perhaps

a higher sense ; I mean in range of acquirement and the flavor that comes of it."

It is hardly possible to speak of Longfellow's translation without bringing up the vexed question as to what is the most adequate method of translating poetry, whether it is best to aim at literalness within the limits prescribed by verse, or to regard free poetical movement as of paramount importance, valuing the spirit above the letter, or yet, in despair of reproducing anything like the rhythmic effect of the original, to take refuge in a carefully executed prose translation. As it so happens that we find each of the three methods represented in the work done by our American translators of Dante, we shall briefly review here, and under what we have to say of Dr. Parsons and Professor Norton, the arguments which these several translators have made, or hinted at, in support of their respective theories.

No one recognized more fully than Longfellow the arduousness of the task to which he had set himself. He quotes approvingly the sayings of both Dante and Cervantes about the linguistic impossibility of transferring the melody of verse from one language to another. "The difficulty," said Longfellow, "lies chiefly in the *color* of words. Is the Italian 'ruscelletto gorgolioso' fully rendered by 'gurgling brooklet'? Or the Spanish 'pajaros vocingleros' by 'garrulous birds'? Something is wanting." Yet after his apprentice days he never tried to supply that "something" by resorting to a new word or using a different expression from that of his author. Faithfulness to his original is the fundamental principle of all his mature work. "A great many people think," says he in one of his letters, "that a translation ought not to be too faithful ; that the writer should put *himself* into it as well as his original ; that it should be Homer & Co., or Dante & Co. ; and that what the foreign author really says should be falsified or modified if thereby the smoothness of the verse can be improved. On the contrary, I maintain that a translator, like the witness on the stand, should hold up his right hand and swear to 'tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.'" Longfellow accepted as a foregone conclusion that such strict fidelity to the text before him would rob his verse of much fluidity, ease, and grace of construction ; but this is the price

which the man of one language must pay for the privilege of reading the exact matter of Dante in English verse.

Then, too, Longfellow was fully acquainted with the rhythmic difference between the two languages. He knew that even though he preserved the metrical scheme of the *terza rima*, the rhythm of his lines would vary from that of the Italian, owing to the different time-values of the syllables that make up the corresponding English and Italian words. He therefore not only gave up *terza rima*, but he discarded rhyme altogether. "In translating Dante," said he, "something must be relinquished. Shall it be the beautiful rhyme that blossoms all along the line like a honeysuckle on the hedge? It must be, in order to retain something more precious than rhyme, namely, fidelity, truth,—the life of the hedge itself." The freedom and independence gained by choosing blank verse gave Longfellow a wide latitude in which to seek for the best words to reproduce the Italian passage before him. Though English, through its poverty in rhyme-words, is ill fitted for compositions with the triple rhyme, yet by virtue of its pliability, it is admirably suited to the needs of epic and narrative poetry in blank verse. But as blank verse is one of the grandest of English meters, so also is it one of the most difficult in which to obtain marked success; and we cannot look for the same excellence in its lines when the English poet is bound to the exact matter of another's speech as when he is free to range over the wide fields of thought and expression. Naturally, a literal translation in blank verse will not have all the ease of original composition; and in this Longfellow's Dante is no exception.

Beginners in the study of *Divina Commedia* in English often attribute to a translation many of the difficulties with which they meet in the first reading. They have yet to learn that the obscurities are shared by the Italian original. The poem is not easy reading for even the native of Tuscany. To the objections sometimes urged against Longfellow's rendering on the ground that it is hard to follow, we would give answer that Longfellow did not aim at making a handbook for the study of Dante. He strove merely for a reproduction in English blank verse of what Dante had said in most mellifluous Italian *terza rima*. There his task ended, and what is thought of his accomplishment can be gathered from the words of some representative critics.

Lowell's opinion we have already had. Professor Norton, who according to his own statement was not disposed to "substitute commendation for criticism," expressed himself of the opinion that Longfellow's was the best existing translation of Dante. In speaking of the work, shortly after its appearance, he said: "No one acquainted with the extraordinary felicity of Mr. Longfellow's versions of the poetry of other languages — a felicity which was one of the proofs of his original genius — can have doubted that his success would be great in any task to which he might set himself. But the measure of success he has attained can hardly fail to surprise even those who have the highest confidence in his achievements." No less emphatic were the words of William Dean Howells. "Opening the book," said he, "we stand face to face with the poet, and when his voice ceases we may well marvel if he has not sung to us in his own Tuscan." And John Fiske, after quoting Sainte-Beuve's epigram, "*La belle destinée de ne pouvoir plus mourir, sinon avec un immortel!*" says: "Apart from Mr. Longfellow's other titles to undying fame, such a destiny is surely marked out for him, and throughout the English portions of the world, his name will always be associated with that of the great Florentine."

THOMAS WILLIAM PARSONS.

America had in Parsons a poet of very high order, whose free fancy and exquisite workmanship have not won for him the wide popularity which his contributions to our literature merit. True, he neither sought nor cared for renown; it was only at the solicitation of friends that he was induced to make several partial collections of his poems, and these were for the most part privately printed. Dr. Holmes, in answer to a letter asking whether he could explain why so true a poet as Parsons had not fame commensurate with his genius, wrote: "Parsons *is* appreciated by scholars; his genius is recognized widely in Europe, and his poems are greatly admired there. A great part of his literary work is in translations, and this, while perhaps it should, does not always gain for the writer the fame corresponding to the value of the work. In his lifelong devotion

to Dante, by the absorbing study he has given him, I attribute his felicity of style, the exquisite literary art that characterizes his work. He does not, with his fine poetical genius, give us poems often enough. Some of his poems have the most pathetic tenderness, grace, music, and finished art, and they rank with the best of our or any other period. His translation of Dante will carry his name to posterity as a noble and monumental achievement."¹

He was a sensitive and impressionable youth, and a journey to Italy at the age of seventeen had much to do with the moulding of his likes and studies in after life. This first visit to Florence and his early introduction to Dante are recalled in the opening lines of his poem, "La Pineta Distrutta."

Farewell, Ravenna's forest ! and farewell
For aye through coming centuries to the sound,
Over blue Adria, of the lyric pines,
And Chiassi's bird-song keeping burden sweet
To their low moan as once to Dante's lines,
Which, when my step first felt Italian ground,
I strove to follow, carried by the spell
Of that sad Florentine whose native street
(At morn and midnight) where he used to dwell,
My father bade me pace with reverent feet.²

In another place, speaking of this same visit to Florence, he tells us that it was "there, in the venerable Borgo Sant' Apostolo, consecrated, in my imagination, by a verse of Dante's, in the ancient House of the Acciaiuoli, and in the home of a learned lady who bore the name of the poet, I became enamoured of the *Divina Commedia*." A few years later the young enthusiast essayed a literal line-for-line version of his newly found treasure. With the hopefulness of youth he aspired even to the triple rhyme, but he soon discovered that he had aimed too high, and must content himself with some measure less exacting and more in accord with the

¹ *The Bostonian*, June, 1895.

² "The delicate involution or inversion of these lines," writes Miss Guiney, "is a good instance of a marked literary peculiarity of Dr. Parsons, which none of our poets shared with him. I have no doubt he got this graceful Latinism directly from Dante, as he had it from Virgil."

restrictions imposed upon him by his task. He therefore espoused the quatrain, used with such good effect by Dryden and Gray, which he felt to be the nearest approach to the "lengthened harmony" of the *terza rima* recognizable by English ears.

Parsons was twenty-four years of age when, in 1843, he issued his translation of the first ten cantos of the *Inferno*, a modest little volume in brown boards. The translation was prefaced by the "Lines on a Bust of Dante," which have since become famous, and have been gathered into the anthologies. In reviews of the book, this poem was singled out for special mention. Longfellow showed his appreciation by including it in "The Estray," a collection of poems edited by him and published in 1847. The translation itself was received with some qualifications of approval; its grace and finish were quite generally admired, but exception was taken to the frequent divergence from Dante's word and manner. The translator was advised by more than one well-meaning reviewer to study Dante more closely. Among the last words written by the then very aged Cary are those of a letter to the young American poet:

Sir, —

February 26, 1844.

Many thanks from an old brother translator for your kind consideration in sending him your version of the first ten cantos of the *Inferno*. I received it only a day or two since and have read it twice with much pleasure. It appears to me to possess in a remarkable degree the fluency, vivacity, and harmony of original composition. This unavoidably is effected at the expense of some departure from Dante's grave and sedate character, though his general meaning is faithfully given. The form of rhymes you have adopted is probably the best our language can afford for the purpose: the *terza rima* would often be found totally unmanageable.

If you persevere in your intention of going on with the remainder of the *Divina Commedia*, there is great hope of your producing a work that will please a numerous class of readers; and you will render a good service to the cause of our common literature. I remain, sir,

Your very faithful humble servant,

H. F. CARY.

Although Dr. Parsons kept the work constantly in mind, and was urged by his friends to continue his translation, he did not live (though he lived long enough!) to complete the *Purgatorio*, and the *Paradiso* is

represented but by a few fragments.¹ His was not the nature to be tied down to such a service, unless the inspiration of the moment impelled him to it. His own Muse was constantly claiming his thought and leading him afield. He excused himself for entertaining his own fancies in the lines —

Friends must be patient when I do these things,
Wasting an hour that might be better given
To work — in following Dante far as heaven.
For when unbid the spirit inly sings,
And will not be controlled by other's mood,
That hour is oft the harvest time that brings
The best thought uppermost : if then subdued
To serve a master, my own goddess flies,
And inspiration cometh not if sought,
And second best is only half way good.

Longfellow's description of Dr. Parsons as the "Poet" of the "Wayside Inn" is a happy analysis of the man's make-up :

A poet, too, was there, whose verse
Was tender, musical, and terse :
The inspiration, the delight,
The gleam, the glory, the swift flight
Of thoughts so sudden that they seem
The revelations of a dream.
All these were his ; but with them came
No envy of another's fame ;
He did not find his sleep less sweet
For music in some neighboring street,
Nor rustling hear in every breeze
The laurels of Miltiades.
Honor and blessings on his head
While living, good report when dead,
Who, not too eager for renown,
Accepts, but does not clutch, the crown !

¹ "Though Dr. Parsons was a ripe scholar," said one who knew him well, "familiar with all classic literature, and had no life, as it were, outside these patrician friendships, — yet Dante was truly the Only One to him. Longfellow, and even our dear Lowell, had, after all, other heroes. I think Parsons' mind was more dominated by Dante, and infused with his thought, than theirs."

Under date of June 2, 1867, Longfellow makes mention in his journal of a call from Parsons, and a talk they had about theories of translation. What a pity to have no record of that conversation ! The third and last volume of Longfellow's Dante was to appear that month, and Dr. Parsons had just completed his translation of the *Inferno*. The whole subject of the translating of poetry must have been very fresh in the minds of both, and it would be instructive to know what each had to say in favor of his theory, after he had given it so thorough a trial. Both had changed somewhat in their opinions regarding the translator's art, since their first attempts at it many years before. The more famous poet had become stricter in his tenets concerning literalness ; while the other, after an early endeavor at an exact verbal rendering in *terza rima*, had soon abandoned this foreign metrical form as unsuited to the genius of our language, and had taken to the freer rendering and more fluent lines of the version he has left us. Longfellow, in a series of disconnected remarks scattered throughout his journal and letters, has given us his reasons for the views he held on the art of translating, but Dr. Parsons has told us nothing.

Though Parsons never gave us his theories, his practices proclaimed his principles. It is of the nature of poetry that the idea shall be *en rapport* with the form into which it is cast, and the truer the poetry, the closer the bond. The whole problem of translating verse into verse turns upon the question of transferring this harmony between thought and form, of reproducing, as near as the changed conditions will allow, the same relation between the verse and its content as existed in the original. Now, Dante's style, which Lowell speaks of as being "parsimonious in the number of its words, goldenly sufficient in the value of them," renders him a superlatively difficult author to translate literally into easy-flowing English verse. With the choice of his meter was determined in large part the nature of Parsons' version. Even though he strove to follow Dante closely, he must constantly be called upon to compress three of his author's lines into two of his own, or amplify the same into an entire quatrain. But interpolation falsifies the original, dilation weakens the sense, and with Dante abridgment is not to be thought of. However, in weighing the demands of fidelity to the text against the claims of

rhythm and idiomatic English, Parsons is sure to think most of the construction of his lines. Careful finish is characteristic of his verse, and even in translation he cannot forego his delight in this, though it be at the expense of his author's exact words. Yet Dante's every thought is precious to Parsons, and he is not one of those translators who hope to improve upon their original. Taken largely, there is, in his version, no wide departure from the sense and purport of the original; but Dante's distinctive style is wanting, and a new foreign spirit is infused into the *rifacimento*. It is as if Parsons had heeded the counsel of Sir John Denham, who says of the translator, "it is not his business alone to translate language into language, but poesie into poesie; and poesie is of so subtle a spirit, that in pouring out of one language into another it will all evaporate; and if a new spirit is not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a *caput mortuum*."

Parsons is one of that long line of English translators, headed by King Alfred, who strove to follow Boëthius, "now word for word, now spirit for spirit." To this company belonged Pope, who held that "the fire of a poem is what a translator should principally regard," and Dryden, with his belief that "it would be unreasonable to limit a translator to the narrow compass of his author's words." The class has had many apologists, in many tongues. An ardent advocate of their principles is Schlegel, the German translator of Shakespeare, who strove to "follow, step by step, the letter of the sense, and yet catch part of the innumerable, indescribable beauties which do not lie in the letter, but hover about it like an intellectual spirit." A worthy object, it may be; but just how is the translator to catch the particular charm of his foreign poet? The spirit of poetry is of an evanescent nature, and eludes the pursuer like a will-o'-the-wisp. There is the ever-present danger of the translator's being wrong in his personal estimate of what constitutes the spirit of his author, and, even if he judged aright, would he be able to reproduce the characteristic tone by this method of sketching in of added color? The tendency towards realism, which is seen so widely in the literature of to-day, is averse to this method of portrayal, and prefers the more faithful and impersonal work of the metaphrast, hoping that some suggestion of the spirit may accompany the translated words. And

with the great poets the precise word is often a matter of much moment. The minor and the lyric poets will admit of freer handling. In the *Divina Commedia* particularly does every word carry with it its own peculiar significance.

Parsons, it is granted, has a much higher ideal of the office of the translator than had the early English representatives of his school whom we have quoted, and he is too much of a modern to disregard so unconcernedly the text before him. He has many happy renderings of the sense of his author, and his English is of so rare a type that it cannot but please; and because of its merits as an English poem, his translation will never want for admirers. By virtue of its melody, it charms the reader and holds his attention. Years ago Professor Norton spoke of it as a work which of its kind "can hardly be too warmly praised; nor is it to detract from its praise to say that though free, it is not more poetic than the literal version of its author's brother-poet [Longfellow]." Beyond this oppositeness in the methods pursued by the two translators is the added difference of their diction, — a natural consequence of their different positions. While Longfellow seeks for words of Romance origin, Parsons delights in plain Saxon phrases. The Italian constantly shines through Longfellow's rendering; but Parsons' lines are read with but little suggestion of their being from a foreign original. As a memorial to Dante, and especially as a contribution to American literature, the work of Dr. Parsons will always be cherished. He has been granted the prayer with which he closed the completed first canticle, "*Tantus labor non sit cassus*," and he himself received into the circle of those who do honor to the divine poet.

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

It is no exaggeration to say that, in the understanding of Dante, few of any time or country have surpassed our own genuinely American Lowell. His appreciation was of the keenest, and his ability, as a critic, of the highest order. Poet and scholar, he combined happily the insight of the one with the trained judgment of the other. As

the fruit of a long study of Dante, he has left us an essay which, as Mr. Norton says, "makes other writing about the poet and the poem seem ineffectual and superfluous." This essay, as printed in his collected works, is made up of a biographical sketch published in the "New American Encyclopædia" (1859), and of a magazine article written in 1872, in the heat of summer and all the bustle preceding a departure for Europe. The two articles were afterwards skilfully blended, and though the resulting essay lacks of necessity some of the unity of form which we expect from such a writer as Lowell, it has what is wanting to so many essays on the same theme, — a distinct picture of who Dante was, a clear and concise estimate of what he believed, and an admirable account of the life he lived and the books he wrote.¹

Lowell was a most assiduous reader. He not only read widely, but his favorite books he read and re-read. He always went to the original sources, and had little use for diluted information. He found translations disenchanting, and thought them at best "but an imitation of natural flowers in cambric or wax." "It is precisely those works," he remarked in a college lecture, "which are most characteristic, which most deepen and widen the mind, which quicken the sense of beauty, which beckon the imagination — it is precisely those which are untranslatable, nay, which are so in exact proportion as they are masterly. This is especially true of the great poets, the glow of whose genius fuses the word and the idea into a rich Corinthian metal which no imitation can replace." For commentators of the usual run Lowell had nothing but maledictions. He sees the Italians forever twitching at Dante's sleeve and "trying to make him

¹ "One need not be a Dantean scholar to comprehend the scope and strength of this prolonged, cumulative, coherent analysis of the Florentine's career, fortified by citations, and enriched with knowledge of Italian history, literature, atmosphere, at the close of the thirteenth century, such as few living men possess." — E. C. Stedman, *Poets of America*.

Of this essay Dr. Holmes said in a letter to Lowell, "It serves a great purpose, quite independently of its value with reference to Dante and his readers; it shows our young American scholars that they need not be provincial in their way of thought or their scholarship because they happen to be born or bred in an outlying district of the great world of letters." — J. S. Morse, Jr., *Life and Letters of O. W. Holmes*, ii, p. 116.

say he is of their way of thinking. Of their way indeed ! One would think he might be free of them, at least, in Paradise." It was to the author's own words that Lowell continually went and would have others go. He believed that one might get a thoroughly good education out of a work like Dante's, if read in the right way, inquiringly, and with constant self-interrogation. It was in this manner that he himself became so intimately acquainted with the *Divina Commedia*. In one of his college lectures he has given an outline of the spread of his interest when once it had been awakened:

One is sometimes asked by young men to recommend to them a course of reading. My advice would always be to confine yourself to the supreme books in whatever literature ; still better to choose some one great author and grow thoroughly familiar with him. For as all roads lead to Rome, so they all likewise lead thence ; and you will find that in order to understand perfectly and weigh exactly any really vital piece of literature, you will be gradually and pleasantly persuaded to studies and explorations of which you little dreamed when you began, and will find yourselves scholars before you are aware of it. If I may be allowed a personal explanation, it was my own profound admiration for the *Divina Commedia* of Dante that lured me into what little learning I possess. For remember there is nothing less fruitful than scholarship for the sake of mere scholarship, nor anything more wearisome in the attainment. But the moment you have an object and a center, attention is quickened — the mother of memory ; and whatever you acquire groups and arranges itself in an order which is lucid because it is everywhere in an intelligent relation to an object of constant and growing interest. Thus, as respects Dante, I asked myself, What are his points of likeness or unlikeness with the authors of classical antiquity ? In how far is either of these an advantage or defect ? What and how much modern literature had preceded him ? How much was he indebted to it ? How far had the Italian language been subdued and supplied to the uses of poetry or prose before his time ? How much did he color the style or thought of the authors who followed him ? Is it a fault or a merit that he is so thoroughly impregnated with the opinions, passions, and even prejudices, not only of his own age, but his country ? To what extent is a certain freedom of opinion, which he shows sometimes on points of religious doctrine, to be attributed to the humanizing influences of the Crusades in enlarging the horizon of the Western mind by bringing it in contact with other races, religions, and social arrangements ? These and a hundred other questions were constant stimulants to thought and inquiry,

stimulants such as no merely objectless and, so to speak, impersonal study could have supplied.

It was a somewhat similar course which Lowell followed in his class-room instruction at Harvard. Some of those who read the modern authors under him remember with pleasure the originality of his method of imparting information, the sprightliness of his digressive talks, and the exceeding profit with which they pursued their work under his inspiring guidance. He was more of a poet than an accepted professor of the modern languages, and he spoke to his pupils of the great poets as poets, and not as fruitful ground for the study of philology.¹ His delightful rambles into the provinces of the man of letters and the moral philosopher, his talks on style and the problems of all times, constituted a vital charm in the minds of the students who each year chose to study under him. This exceptional, unacademic mode of procedure was very effective under his handling. "It made a romance of the hour," says Henry James. "It made even a picture of the scene; it was an unforgettable initiation. . . . He was so steeped in history and literature that to some yearning young persons he made the taste of knowledge sweeter, almost, than it was ever to be again. He was redolent, intellectually speaking, of Italy and Spain; he had lived in long intimacy with Dante and Calderon; he embodied, to envious aspirants, the happy intellectual fortune: independent years in a full library, years of acquisition, without haste and without rest, a robust love of study, which went socially arm in arm with a robust love of life. This love of life was so strong in him that he could lose himself in little diversions, as well as in big books."

Of the reminiscences of Lowell as a teacher, given by his students, none touch so closely on the subject in hand as the sketch written by Professor Barrett Wendell, and we therefore press into service the latter's excellent account of Lowell's method of conducting the study of Dante:

¹ "He had the good fortune to be born before the linguistic age, and the good taste to have been an early representative of the literary study which disregards specialism and ranges free over the goodly pastures of literature."—*Saturday Review*, Feb. 27, 1892.

In my Junior year, a lecture of Professor Norton's excited in me a wish to read Dante under Mr. Lowell. I did not know a word of Italian, though; and I was firmly resolved to waste no more time on elementary grammar. Without much hope of a favorable reception, then, I applied for admission to the course. Mr. Lowell received me in one of the small recitation-rooms in the upper story of University Hall. . . . He listened to my application kindly, . . . and . . . told me to come in to the course and see what I could do with Dante.

To that time my experience of academic teaching had led me to the belief that the only way to study a classic text in any language was to scrutinize every syllable with a care undisturbed by consideration of any more of the context than was grammatically related to it. Any real reading I had done, I had had to do without a teacher. Mr. Lowell never gave us less than a canto to read; and often gave us two or three. He never, from the beginning, bothered us with a particle of linguistic irrelevance. Here before us was a great poem — a lasting expression of what human life had meant to a human being, dead and gone these five centuries. Let us try, as best we might, to see what life had meant to this man; let us see what relation his experience, great and small, bore to ours; and, now and then, let us pause for a moment to notice how wonderfully beautiful his expression of this experience was. Let us read, as sympathetically as we could make ourselves read, the words of one who was as much a man as we, only vastly greater in his knowledge of wisdom and of beauty. That was the spirit of Mr. Lowell's teaching. It opened to some of us a new world. In a month I could read Dante better than I ever learned to read Greek, or Latin, or German.

His method of teaching was all his own. The class was small — not above ten or a dozen; and he generally began by making each student translate a few lines, interrupting now and then with suggestions of the poetic value of passages which were being rendered in a style too exasperatingly prosaic. Now and again, some word or some passage would suggest to him a line of thought — sometimes very earnest, sometimes paradoxically comical — that it would never have suggested to any one else. And he would lean back in his chair, and talk away across country till he felt like stopping; or he would thrust his hands into the pockets of his rather shabby sack-coat, and pace the end of the room with his heavy laced boots, and look at nothing in particular, and discourse of things in general. We gave up note-books in a week. Our business was not to cram lifeless detail, but to absorb as much as we might of the spirit of his exuberant literary vitality. And through it all he was always a quiz; you never knew

what he was going to do or to say next. One whimsical digression I have always remembered, chiefly for the amiable atrocity of the pun. Some mention of wings had been made in the text, whereupon Mr. Lowell observed that he had always had a liking for wings: he had lately observed that some were being added to the ugliest house in Cambridge, and he cherished hopes that they might fly away with it. I remember, too, how one tremendous passage in the *Inferno* started him off in a disquisition concerning canker-worms, and other less mentionable—if more diverting—vermin. And then, all of a sudden, he soared up into the clouds, and pounced down on the text again, and asked the next man to translate. You could not always be sure when he was in earnest; but there was never a moment when he let you forget that you were a human being in a human world, and that Dante had been one, too. One or two of us, among ourselves, nicknamed him “sweet wag”; I like the name still.

After a month or two, he found that we were not advancing fast enough. So he fell into a way of making us read one canto to him, and then reading the next to us. If we wished to interrupt him, we were as free to do so as he was to interrupt us. There was one man in the class, I remember, who liked to read out-of-the-way books, and who used to break in on Mr. Lowell's translation with questions about Gabriel Harvey and other such worthies, rather humorously copying Mr. Lowell's own irrelevancies; but he could never get hold of anything so out of the way that Mr. Lowell had not read it, or at least could not talk about it as easily as if he had read it often. So, in a single college year, we read through the *Divine Comedy*, and the *Vita Nuova*, and dipped into the *Convito* and the lesser writings of Dante. And more than one of us learned to love them always.

We have already seen how many attractions Dante had for Lowell. “The more you study him,” says he, in one of his letters, “the more sides you find, and yet the ray from him is always white light. I learn continually to prize him more as man, poet, artist, moralist, and teacher.” As a man, Dante was for Lowell the preëminent figure of mediæval Italy, and he sometimes felt that Italian history of that day was chiefly of value so far as it furnished material for explanatory footnotes to Dante's greatest work. The young Florentine, who upon the very entrance into manhood had a fixed conception of the meaning and purport of life, and the exile, who in his last days could build out of his broken career that “three-arched bridge, still firm against the wash and wear of ages,” guided and inspired him. The

applicability of Dante's teaching to the practical conduct of our own lives, the fact that Dante's poem is the allegory of a human life, impressed Lowell very strongly. "Whatever subsidiary interpretations the poem is capable of," said he, "its great and primary value is as the autobiography of a human soul, of yours and mine it may be, as well as Dante's. In that lie its profound meaning and its permanent force."

As a moralist and teacher, Dante stood apart in Lowell's mind from the other truly great men of letters. Shakespeare was for him the most comprehensive intellect, but Dante the highest spiritual nature that has found expression in rhythmical form. "Dante," says he, "penetrates to the moral core of those who once fairly come within his sphere, and possesses them wholly." In his attitude towards this chosen hero of his, we catch a glimpse of the graver side of Lowell's nature, a phase in his well-rounded character which readers often lose sight of, through the abounding fun and wit they find within his pages.¹ Lowell was true to his New England inheritance, and he shares with her other representative writers their healthy moral tone. He and Longfellow had much in common in their appreciation of Dante; the elevating and sustaining influence of the *Divine Comedy* was deeply felt by both of them. It was when he mourned the death of his wife that Longfellow turned for solace to the translating of Dante. Lowell speaks of loving Dante because "he is not merely a great poet, but an influence, part of the soul's resources in time of trouble." With the sacred imagery and religious tone of Longfellow's sonnets on translating the *Divina Commedia*, compare the following words from Lowell: "As the Gothic cathedral, then, is the type of the Christian idea, so is it also of Dante's poem. . . . Complete and harmonious in design as his work is, it is yet no pagan temple enshrining a type of the human made divine by triumph of corporeal beauty; it is not a private chapel housing a single saint and dedicated to one chosen bloom of Christian piety or devotion; it

¹ "Mr. Lowell, the jester, though he keeps slyly nudging Mr. Lowell, the critic, and occasionally interrupting his master's serious discourse with the privileged impertinence of motley, is still a person of secondary interest, and it is with his master's utterances that we are chiefly concerned." — William Watson, *Excursions in Criticism*.

is truly a cathedral, over whose altar hangs the emblem of suffering, of the divine made human, to teach the beauty of adversity, the eternal presence of the spiritual, — not overhanging and threatening, but informing and sustaining the material. In this cathedral of Dante's there are side-chapels, as is fit, with altars to all Christian virtues and perfections; but the great impression of its leading thought is that of aspiration, forever and ever. In the three divisions of the poem we may trace something more than a fancied analogy with a Christian basilica. There is, first, the ethnic forecourt, then the purgatorial middle space, and last the holy of holies dedicated to the eternal presence of the mediatorial God." Lowell's worship of Dante was never blind adoration; the critic within him never slumbered, else he could not have so laid hold of the essential traits of his author. He saw clearly, that though Dante was a great figure in the thought and statesmanship of the age in which he lived, it was as poet that he had the strongest claim upon posterity. Underlying the many-sided character of Dante, Lowell always saw the poet, "irradiating and vivifying, gleaming through in a picturesque phrase, or touching things unexpectedly with that ideal light which softens and subdues like distance in the landscape." Making every deduction for the dry patches of mediæval physics and metaphysics in the *Divina Commedia*, Lowell considered Dante the first of descriptive as well as of moral poets.

CHARLES ELIOT NORTON.

The last American Dante student of whom we shall speak is Mr. Norton, the friend of the three New England interpreters whose work we have just been reviewing, and himself a careful translator of Dante. Though the present occasion does not admit of a detailed account of Mr. Norton's services toward the spreading of Dantesque studies in America, yet our sketch would be incomplete without some passing reference to his work in this field.

Mr. Norton's earliest contribution to Dante literature appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* for 1859, and consisted of an essay on the

Vita Nuova, accompanied by specimen translations. In 1867 the completed translation was published, together with some additional comment. At that time the *Vita Nuova* was just beginning to receive the attention from English students warranted by its importance in Dante's literary history and development, and Mr. Norton's volume was therefore welcome.¹ It is more literal than Rossetti's version, with which it was almost contemporaneous. In 1891-92 Mr. Norton published a prose translation of the *Divina Commedia*, — a translation in which the principles of his early work again rule.

It is only of recent years that the literal prose rendering of poetical work has received due recognition from the literary critic. Early associations act as powerful sources of prejudice, and there are many who after their college days are unable to regard a prose version in any other light than that of a "crib." This is unjust to such excellent work as the translations of Homer by Butcher, Leaf, Lang, Myers, and Palmer, and of Dante by Carlyle, Butler, and Norton. Some of these men are masters of English prose, but this is not the prime reason for their adoption of it as the vehicle of their authors' thoughts. They all grant that they leave unattempted half the problem of translation, but it is from no want of effort, no slackness of endeavor; they have chosen prose rather from a pressing sense that the charm which the genius of the poet has given to his verse is intransmutable. Yet the best of these translators into prose pay great attention to their English, and endeavor to please the ear while satisfying the exacting mind of a realistic age. The absence of care about rhythm and rhyme makes it possible for a literal prose translation to be so much easier of comprehension and assimilation at the first reading.

It is interesting to note how all the translators of Dante into English prose, even with their divergent conceptions as to the best means of attaining a common end, pay tribute to Dr. John Carlyle, the first to enter the field. Appreciating the excellence of Dr. Car-

¹ The earliest complete translation of the *Vita Nuova* into English was that by Joseph Garrow, published in Florence in 1846. Dean Plumptre, with characteristic carelessness, speaks of the translator as an American. Mr. Francis Boott, of Cambridge, Mass., who knew Garrow in Florence, assures me there is no doubt of Garrow having been an Irishman.

lyle's rendering of the *Inferno*, Mr. Butler began his translation with the second canticle. Dugdale's *Purgatorio* was undertaken in the hope that it might serve as a companion volume to Dr. Carlyle's *Inferno*. "Had Dr. Carlyle made a version of the whole poem," says Professor Norton in his preface, "I should hardly have cared to attempt a new one. His conception of what a translation should be is very much the same as my own." Of the barrenness of prose as a medium for thoughts born of a poet's mind and couched in the noblest verse, no one could be more conscious than Professor Norton, and he translates with the hope that the "imagination may mould the prose as it moulded the verse."

For the past ten years Mr. Norton has given instruction in Dante as part of his regular duties of Professor in Harvard College. In 1894 he delivered the Turnbull Lectures on poetry at Johns Hopkins University, choosing Dante for his theme.

A few more indications of the hold which Dante has taken on American scholarship and we are done with this part of our subject. That America should have the oldest of the existing Dante societies is a flattering proof of the seriousness of the interest shown here in his work. Mr. Norton was one of its founders; the Dante books which he had collected for his own use were given to the Harvard College Library, and formed the nucleus of the collection since maintained by the Dante Society. By the support and encouragement which this society gave to the publication of Dr. Fay's "Concordance," it has earned the gratitude of all students. This monument of diligence and care is an achievement of which the compiler can well feel proud. "I have often thought," writes Dr. Moore, "that the most generally useful commentary on the *Divina Commedia* in existence is the invaluable 'Concordance' of Dr. Fay."¹ Scartazzini, who admits with gratitude that he daily finds need to consult this work, says that "its value can only be recognized and estimated after a lengthened use of it. It is certain that this at any rate will never grow dusty in the library of a student of Dante."

Americans have made many other contributions of a varied nature to Dantean literature, mostly *livres de vulgarisation*; but the future

¹ "Studies in Dante," 1896, p. 45.

should be more productive than the past. The scholar of to-day has vastly greater facilities for carrying on his researches in America than had the student of a generation — yes, or even a decade ago. The Dante library at Harvard is now not his only rich resource. At Cornell University the student can find what is in some respects the most remarkable Dante collection in the world. Books have been gathered there from the four quarters to take their place in the cosmopolitan literature of the *Divina Commedia* and its author; its all-round completeness and bibliographical rarities are a delight to both the student and bibliophile. The donor, Mr. Willard Fiske, has said in a private letter of recent date: "My own collection is a surprise even to myself. I began it with the idea of sending to Cornell some two or three hundred of the more useful Dante works, that the student might have at least something to begin on. But my interest grew as the books turned up, until the collection became what it is." Then, too, the rich Italian library of the late Francis C. Macauley has recently been bequeathed to the University of Pennsylvania, and, with its wealth of early editions, may be expected to fill out in some measure the unavoidable gaps of the other two American collections.

Thus happily situated, Americans ought to grow familiar with Dante; but, as Lowell said, his life and work have in them a meaning of such depth as "few men have meaning enough in themselves wholly to penetrate." It is to be regretted that there is no hope of Dante ever taking the place of a popular author with us, of becoming one of our intimates. He would leave us a sense of the emptiness of much of that which we make our boast, and would teach us the instability of national position and the permanence of moral worth alone. But the great reading public cares little for instruction, and is given to avoiding those books in which it suspects reproof or correction. Those, however, who have come within the spell of Dante's poetry, his thought, and his ideals, are conscious of the enrichment of their lives and the ennobling of their own aspirations.

APPENDIX.

I. CRITIQUE ON CERTAIN PASSAGES IN DANTE. — DA PONTE.

FIRST PAPER.¹

In the course of my investigations of the difficulties which the language and manner of Dante occasionally present, I have been led to believe that in ten or twelve instances at least, in the *Inferno* alone, modes of interpretation might be offered which would reconcile the objections of the critics, and remove all doubts of the meaning of the author. Of these I now subjoin the first, reserving the others for another opportunity.

Inf. i. 29-30.

Ripresi via per la spiaggia deserta,
Sicchè il piè fermo sempre era il più basso.

In order to ascertain the actual situation, position, and movement of Dante, we ought to go back to verse 13 :

Ma poi ch' io fui appiè del colle giunto
Là ove terminava quella valle,

and to give to the expression *appiè del colle* a signification similar to that conveyed by the following line from one of Petrarch's sonnets :

Appiè de' colli ove la bella vesta.

¹ "We recommend to the curious in Italian literature, and particularly to the admirers of the *Divina Commedia*, the following proposed interpretations of several very difficult passages in the *Inferno* of Dante. They are decidedly the best explanations we have seen of the passages referred to, on which, by the way, whole volumes have been written. With regard to the new reading of *che i* for *ch' ei*, the merest novice in Italian will acknowledge the improvement; and it is really surprising that a correction so simple, and so perfectly satisfactory, should not have been suggested by any of the Dantesque commentators, who for five hundred years have been striving to outdo each other in *variae lectiones* and new interpretations. The other explanations are ingenious and most probably correct." — [Editorial note in the *New York Review and Athenæum Magazine*, probably by Anderson.]

Here every one will admit that the poet does not speak of a place *actually adjoining*, but merely of a place *very near* the foot of the hills, in which place Laura was born, and where, too, the five *pernici*, supposed to be referred to by the poet, ranged while they lived "unhindered and unhurt."

There appear to me to be two good reasons for this interpretation. First, Dante in order to express perfect contact, makes use elsewhere of a much stronger expression. I refer to the 134th verse of the 17th canto of the *Inferno*.

Appiè appiè della stagliata rocca.

Secondly, if Dante had been actually at the foot of the hill, in the strict sense of the word, he could not possibly have seen its summit¹ "clad in the sun's bright rays." Let us now examine how this construction agrees with the context.

Dante, "in the middle of the way of life," finds himself in the forest of Error. He cannot tell how he came there, but merely recollects that a moment previous he was "oppressed with sleep," that is, in a state of intellectual unconsciousness, arising from the violence of his passions. In this "rugged, wild, and gloomy" forest, he loses his way and soon after finds himself (he either will not or cannot tell how) at the foot of a hill bounding this valley or forest. Alarmed at this, he raises his eyes to the summit of the hill and there sees the rays of the sun. *Allor fu la paura un poco queta*, and he turns round to look upon the pass *che non lasciò giammai persona viva*, that is, *lasciò passar*, or in other words, the pass which no living soul ever omitted or was exempted from passing. Then

Riprese via per la spiaggia deserta,

and this brings us to the difficulty.

It would be difficult to persuade me that this *piaggia deserta* means the beginning of the *ascent*. Dante says expressly that he resumed his previous way, or walked again along the *piaggia*,

Sicchè il piè fermo sempre era il più basso,

and then began to ascend. This ascent is, moreover, announced by an emphatic *Ed ecco*, denoting that then, and not till then, did the rise begin.

To conclude —

Ripresi via per la spiaggia deserta,

¹ *Spalle* certainly means the summit of the hill, and not the *quasi sommità*, as Biagioli wishes us to believe; because if the sun's rays had reached the side of the hill, the forest would not have been dark, nor would the poet have been obliged to raise his eyes to see the light. — Da P.

I resumed my way along the solitary *plain* (where alone *il piè fermo sempre è il più basso*), and walked toward the hill, — that is, toward the seat of truth ; but in such a way that my firm foot was always lower than the other. This I take to mean : I still continued in the path of error, not daring to ascend the hill of truth. After going a short distance, and just as I had reached the beginning of the rise, my further progress is opposed by Pleasure, Pride, and Avarice, so much so that (to repeat Dante's *jeu de mots*),

Back to return at every turn I turned.

In this way the literal sense is abundantly perspicuous, and the allegorical extremely apt and beautiful.¹

SECOND PAPER.²

Among the arguments I offered, in my last communication, to support the interpretation I proposed, of the 30th line of the 1st canto of Dante's *Inferno*, I omitted to call your attention to the 31st line :

And lo ! not far from the hill's first ascent,

¹ It is not Da Ponte's intention to make *piaggia* the equivalent of *piano*, which ordinarily is its direct opposite in meaning, but to interpret the word in its poetical signification of "quasivoglia luogo." In this sense, as is remarked in the "Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca," the word is equivalent to the Latin *plaga tractus*, or the Greek *χώρα*, and is used thus in Petrarch's lines :

Cesare taccio, che per ogni piaggia
Fece l' erbe sanguigne,

and again

Consumando mi vo di piaggia in piaggia
Il dì pensoso, poi piango la notte.

Dante uses the word half a dozen times in the *Commedia*, thrice in an unmistakable sense. From its primary meaning of hillside or slope, the word derives its secondary meaning of the bank of a river or the shore of an ocean ; it occurs with the latter signification in *Inf.* iii. 92, *Purg.* ii. 50, xvii. 78. Da Ponte would, of course, translate the *piaggia* of *Inf.* ii. 62, in the same manner as in the line in the first canto. The only other occurrence of the word in the *Commedia* is in *Purg.* iv. 34-35 :

Poichè noi fummo in su l' orlo supremo
Dell' alta ripa, alla scoperta piaggia.

By different commentators and translators *scoverta piaggia* here has been variously understood as referring to the ridge of the mountain in full view, the unobstructed mountain side or slope, and the open country or lea beyond. — T. W. K.

² "We again call the attention of amateurs to this critique. In the present instance the explanation offered is one of the happiest we have ever seen." — [Eds.]

which not only points out the place of the first appearance of the panther, but shows conclusively that Dante had *not yet* reached the "cominciar dell' erta," — the beginning or foot of the ascent ; because the interjection *ecco* is almost always used to denote the time and place of the first appearance of a new object, or the first occurrence of a new event. If Dante was prevented from going further by the "panther," when this panther was only "*quasi* al cominciare dell' erta," it follows, of course, that Dante had not yet arrived at the foot of the hill, his progress toward it being intercepted by the panther.

I now pass on to another passage which appears to me to have been strangely misunderstood.

Inf. iii. 109-111.

Caron dimonio, con occhi di bragia
Loro accennando tutte le raccoglie,
Batte col remo qualunque s' adagia.

The commentators have uniformly made *batte* an active verb, and have agreed to consider this last line as meaning that Charon, impatient at the delay,

Beats soundly with his oar the loitering shades !

Let us see how this strange commentary is supported by the context. At verse 71, Dante, seeing a great number of souls collecting on the bank of a river, turns to his conductor, saying,

Master, give me to know what souls are these,
And what is that which makes them seem (for so
Even through this feeble light to me they seem)
In *such swift haste* to pass from shore to shore.

At verses 111, 117, these souls, which according to the commentators require the stimulus of Charon's oar (a long oar, by the way, he must have had), are described in the beautiful similitudes of Dante, as hastening to the boat

Like autumn foliage dropping to the ground,
Or falcons stooping to the fowler's call.¹

Again, at verse 124, Virgil says that these lazy souls who, like asses at a

¹ Come d' autunno si levan le foglie
L' una appresso dell' altra, infin che 'l ramo
Rende alla terra tutte le sue spoglie ;
Similmente il mal seme d' Adamo
Gittansi di quel lito ad una ad una
Per cenni, com' augel per suo richiamo.

ferry, must, it seems, be beaten with an oar to make them move, are always eager to get over ; because, to use the poet's own strong language,

The justice of their Judge so pricks them on,
That fear is lost in longing.

Surely such a commentary has no need of comment. The following is the explanation I would offer. Charon, says the poet,

With eyes of fire and guiding glance of sign,
Gathers them all together.

With what sign? The answer, one would think, was obvious enough : "the grim ferryman" *batte col remo*, strikes with his oar, — and then — *qualunque s' adagia* — each one takes his seat in Charon's barque,¹ and that willingly, and even eagerly ; because, in the words of Dante, above translated,

La divina giustizia gli sprona
Sì che la tema si volge in disio.²

THIRD PAPER.

Inf. v. 77-78.

Vedrai quando saranno
Più presso a noi ; e tu allor gli prega
Per quell' amor ch' *ei* mena ; e quei verranno.
Thou shalt see,
When they are nearer ; then adjure them by
That love which is their lord, and they will come.

Venturi tells us that *ei* is here taken in the sense of *eglino* ; but yet, he adds with great gravity, you cannot say *eino* instead of *eglino* ; whereupon he utters maledictions against the absurdities of grammar. Volpi, I believe, has closed his eyes upon this passage, as well as the Avignon editor,³ who on

¹ This is certainly one of the significations of *adagiarsi*, which means not only to walk *adagio* or slowly, but to sit *a suo agio* — at one's ease — in a convenient or reclining posture. This is, in all probability, the meaning of the word as it occurs in Petrarch, Part I, Canzone v, st. iii, v. 10,

Il Pastor, *etc.*,
Ivi senza pensier s' adagia e dorme. — Da P.

² For a recent statement of the various interpretations of this passage, see the chapter on "L' adagiarsi delle anime" in O. Antognoni's "Saggio di studj sopra la Commedia di Dante," Livorno, 1893, and the discussion occasioned by G. Maruffi's note in "Giornale dantesco," 1893, vol. i, pp. 217-218. — T. W. K.

³ "La divina commedia, con argomenti ed annotazioni scelte dai migliori commentatori." Avignone, 1816. 3 vol. 24°.

more occasions than one shows himself marvelously clever in getting around a difficulty. Lombardi has recourse to a ridiculous paraphrase,¹ and Biagioli thinks *ch' ei mena* means *ch' ei mena insieme*, which might answer if we make *ei* the nominative case singular, referring to *amore*. It is certainly very singular, that amidst such a variety of explanations, not a commentator among them all appears to have suspected the interpretation which I take to be undoubtedly the true one, and which one would think is almost as obvious as it is completely satisfactory. To have the right reading, it is not necessary to alter a letter or a stop ; in the word *ei* detach the *i* from the *e* and everything is clear :

E tu gli prega
Per quell' amor che i mena, e quei verranno.²

The pronoun *i* is then in the objective case plural, for *li* or *gli*, and this is so far from being a harsh construction that we have the authority of Dante himself for this identical license :

La sconoscente vita *che i* fe sozzi.

Inf. vii. 53.

In the same way another sentence, which has been considered an obscure one, is made perfectly intelligible. Let the 18th verse of the 18th canto of the *Inferno* be printed thus :

Infino al pozzo che i tronca e raccogli ;

and all the forced and far-fetched explanations of the commentators fall to the ground as useless or absurd.

Inf. ix. 7-8.

Pure a noi converrà vincer la pugna,
Commenciò ei — se non — tal ne s' offerse.

¹ "Sincope d' *elli*, adoperato dagli antichi nel retto caso e nell' obliquo, equivale qui a *loro*, — *ch' ei mena*, dice così invece di dire, *ch' è loro cagione d' essere da quella bufèra dimenati*."

² This reading is now quite generally adopted. Bartolommeo Perazzini gave it in his "Corectiones et adnotationes," originally published in 1775, in a miscellaneous volume long since a rarity, and reprinted by Scolari in his "Intorno alle Epistole latine di Dante," Venice, 1844. "Sic legendum censet," says Perazzini, "erud. Joseph Thomasellius heic et ubique similis locus occurrat, cum nusquam *ei* occusativum invenire sit. Et quidem apud Vellutellum ita legimus:

Per quell' amore, che i mena, et ei verranno."

Since about 1835, in the case of the passage cited by Da Ponte, as well as in the similar ones of *Par.* xii. 26, and *xxix.* 4, *che i* has been given in all but the carelessly edited texts and the reprints of old works. — T. W. K.

The commentators, without exception, consider the pronoun *tal* as referring here to Beatrice. With all due respect to that "donna gentile," I cannot help thinking that the Angel is the person here alluded to, and that for three reasons: First, because the lady Beatrice did not offer any personal assistance to Dante, but merely solicited in his behalf the services of Virgil, and, after having thus addressed him,

Or muovi, e con la tua parola ornata
E con ciò ch' è mestieri al suo compare
L'ajuta sì ch'io ne sia consolata,

she then told him her name and her desire to return to the place she had left, and concluded by assuring him that she would not forget to speak well of him when she went back to Heaven.

Quando sarò d' avanti al Signor mio
Di te mi loderò sovente a lui.

Secondly, because *ne s' offerse* does not so much signify "offered her assistance," as "made her appearance to us," and seems to have reference to the passage,

E già di quà da lei discende l' erta
Passando per li cerchi senza scorta
Tal che per lui ci fia la terra aperta.

And thirdly, because *tal ne s' offerse*, with *ne* in the plural number, is scarcely compatible with the interpretation hitherto received, but peculiarly appropriate to the one I have proposed. Beatrice appeared only to Virgil, but the Angel was then descending to present himself before Virgil while Dante was with him, as appears by the verses we have quoted above.

How the aposiopesis, *se non*, is to be supplied, it is perhaps not very easy to determine. But it is probable that Virgil was on the point of saying something disagreeable to Dante, or at least calculated to increase his apprehensions; for instance, "if Beatrice has not deceived us," "if Heaven has not altered its decrees," or something similar; and then suddenly correcting himself, or recollecting the promises of the Angel, finished his sentence in the tone and language of encouragement.

I add a short remark on the third line of the first canto:

Che la diritta via era smarrita.

To say that *chi* has in this place the meaning of *talmente chè* or *perocchè* or *perchè*, which is the explanation almost universally given, is certainly a mistake. Biagioli is the only annotator who has pointed out the error and inconsistency of this interpretation. He agrees with Volpi that there is here an ellipsis of the preposition *in*, but neither he nor Volpi adduce any

classical authority for the use of *che* in the sense of *in che*. There exists, however, a remarkable and conclusive instance of this kind in Petrarch, Part I, son. ii, v. 1 :

Era il giorno *che* al Sol si scoloraro.

Dante himself furnishes another example, *Inf.* i. 11 :

Tanto era pien di sonno in su quel punto
Che la verace via abbandonai.

L. DA PONTE.

II. WILLIAM HICKLING PRESCOTT.

Da Ponte was an ardent advocate of everything Italian, and he fervently resented any imputations, fancied or real, upon the honor of his native country, whether it concerned letters, music, manners, or morals. So sensitive was he in this matter that at the time of the trial of Queen Caroline, when aspersions were cast upon the Italian character, he felt called upon to address an ode to George IV; and again in 1824 when our own historian, Prescott, published in the *North American Review* an article on "Italian Narrative Poetry," Da Ponte thought he saw a slighting estimate of the genius of his fellow-countrymen, and forthwith issued a reply. That Da Ponte misunderstood the position taken by Prescott is plainly evident to us of to-day, and that Prescott had a real fondness for the Italian authors his writings and letters go to show. One of these letters is concerned with his first impressions of Dante, and I shall cite a considerable portion of it, because of its interest as one of the earliest American estimates of the great Florentine. The letter is dated 1824, and was written to George Ticknor, who printed it in his biography of his friend, stating that Prescott "never ceased to talk of Dante in the same tone of admiration in which he thus broke forth in the first study of him, — a noteworthy circumstance, because owing to the imperfect vision that so crippled and curtailed his studies, he was never afterwards able to refresh his first impressions, except, as he did it from time to time, by reading a few favorite passages, or listening to them." It is to be remembered that this is but a familiar letter to a friend, and though the writer must have given the subject some thought, he himself would doubtless have polished and revised his estimate before printing it.

I have finished the *Paradiso* of Dante, and feel as if I had made a most important addition to the small store of my acquisitions. To have read the *Inferno* is not to have read Dante ; his genius shows itself under so very different an aspect in each of his three poems. The *Inferno* will always be the most popular, because it is the most—indeed the only one that is at all—entertaining. Human nature is so delightfully constituted that it can never derive half the pleasure from any relation of happiness that it does from one of misery and extreme suffering. Then there is a great deal of narrative, of action in the *Inferno*, and very little in the two other parts. Notwithstanding all this, I think the impression produced on the mind of the reader by the two latter portions of the work much the most pleasing. You impute a finer, a more exquisite (I do not mean a more powerful), intellectual character to the poet, and, to my notion, a character more deeply touched with a true poetical feeling.

The *Inferno* consists of a series of pictures of the most ingenious, the most acute, and sometimes the most disgusting bodily sufferings. I could wish that Dante had made more use of the *mind* as a source and a means of anguish. Once he has done it with beautiful effect, in the description of a *Barattiere*,¹ who compares his miserable state in hell with his pleasant residence on the banks of the Arno, and draws additional anguish from the comparison. In general, the sufferings he inflicts are of a purely physical nature. His devils and bad spirits, with one or two exceptions, which I remember you pointed out, are much inferior in moral grandeur to Milton's. How inferior that stupendous, overgrown Satan of his to the sublime spirit of Milton, not yet stripped of all its original brightness. I must say that I turn with more delight to the faultless tale of Francesca da Polenta than to that of Ugolino, or of any other in the poem. Perhaps it is in part from its being in such a dark setting, that it seems so exquisite by contrast. The long talks in the *Purgatorio* and the dismal disputations in the *Paradiso* certainly lie very heavy on these parts of the work ; but then this very inaction brings out some of the most conspicuous beauties in Dante's composition.

In the *Purgatorio* we have, in the first ten cantos, the most delicious descriptions of natural scenery, and we feel like one who has escaped from a dungeon into a rich and beautiful country. In the latter portions of it he often indulges in a noble tone of moral reflection. I look upon the *Purga-*

¹ "My friend says, with some hesitation, 'a Barattiere, I believe.' It was in fact a 'Falsificatore'—a counterfeiter—and not a barrator or peculator. The barrators are found in the twenty-first canto of the *Inferno* ; but the beautiful passage here alluded to is in the thirtieth."—G. T.

torio, full of sober meditation and sweet description, as more à l'Anglaise than any other part of the *Commedia*. In the *Paradiso* his shocking argumentations are now and then enlivened by the pepper and salt of his political indignation, but at first they both discouraged and disgusted me, and I thought I should make quick work of the business. But upon reading further, — thinking more of it, — I could not help admiring the genius which he has shown in bearing up under so oppressive a subject. It is so much easier to describe gradations of pain than of pleasure, — but more especially when this pleasure must be of a purely intellectual nature. It is like a painter sitting down to paint the soul. The Scriptures have not done it successfully. They paint the physical tortures of hell, fire, brimstone, etc., but in heaven the only joys, *i.e.*, animal joys, are singing and dancing, which to few people convey a notion of high delight and to many are positively disagreeable.

Let any one consider how difficult, nay impossible, it is to give an entertaining picture of purely intellectual delight. The two highest kinds of pure *spiritual* gratification which, I take it, a man can feel, — at least, I esteem it so, — are that arising from a consciousness of a reciprocated passion (I speak as a lover), and, second, one of a much more philosophic cast, that arising from the successful exertion of his own understanding (as in composition, for instance). Now Dante's pleasures in the *Paradiso* are derived from these sources. Not that he pretends to write books there, but then he disputes like a doctor upon his own studies, — subjects most interesting to him, but unfortunately to no one else. . . .

In all this, however, there was a great want of action, and Dante was forced, as in the *Purgatorio*, to give vent to his magnificent imagination in other ways. He has therefore made use of all the meagre hints suggested metaphorically by the Scriptures, and we have the three ingredients, light, music, and dancing, in every possible and impossible degree of diversity. The *Inferno* is a sort of tragedy, full of action and characters, all well preserved. The *Paradiso* is a great melodrama, where little is said, but the chief skill bestowed upon the machinery, — the getting up, — and certainly there never was such a getting up, anywhere. Every canto blazes with a new and increased effulgence. The very reading of it by another strained my poor eyes. And yet, you never become tired of these gorgeous illustrations, — it is the descriptions that fatigue.

Another beauty, in which he indulges more freely in the last than in the other parts, is his unrivalled similes. I should think you might glean from the *Paradiso* at least one hundred all new and appropriate, fitting, as he says, "like a ring to a finger," and most beautiful. Where are there any comparisons so beautiful?

I must say I was disappointed with the last canto ; but then, as the Irishman said, I expected to be. For what mortal mind could give a portrait of the Deity?¹ The most conspicuous quality in Dante, to my notion, is simplicity. In this I think him superior to any work I ever read, unless it be some parts of the Scriptures. Homer's allusions, as far as I recollect, are not taken from as simple and familiar, yet not vulgar objects, as are Dante's, — from the most common, intimate relations of domestic life, for instance, to which Dante often with great sweetness of nature alludes.

I think it was a fortunate thing for the world that the first poem in modern times was founded on a subject growing out of the Christian religion, or more properly on that religion itself, and that it was written by a man deeply penetrated with the spirit of its sternest creed. The religion indeed would have had its influence sooner or later upon literature. But then a work like Dante's, showing so early the whole extent of its powers, must have had an incalculable influence over the intellectual world, — an influence upon literature almost as remarkable as that exerted by the revelation of Christianity upon the moral world.

It is to Prescott's credit that he saw, at his first reading, the points in which the *Purgatorio* and the *Paradiso* are superior to the *Inferno*. This is often not seen by the reader until he knows well the entire poem. In other things, however, Prescott shows himself but a novice. For example, he has extravagant praise to bestow on Cary's translation, expressing himself of the opinion that "Dante would have given him a place in his ninth heaven, if he could have foreseen his translation." He does not quite approve of the liberties Cary takes, yet commends him for giving "the spirit of the original, the true Dantesque manner." We must not be surprised at this overestimate of Cary ; Coleridge, Southey, and Macaulay went equally wide of the mark in their estimates of him. Would that it were possible for any translation to give at once the spirit and the manner of the original.

¹ "No such personification can be effected without the illustration from physical objects, and how degrading are these to our conceptions of Omnipotence ! The repeated failures of the Italians who have attempted this in the arts of design are still more conspicuous. Even the genius of Raphael has only furnished another proof of the impotence of his art." — From Prescott's reply to Da Ponte.

Lowell, on the contrary, finds nothing in all poetry approaching the imaginative grandeur of Dante's vision of God.